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Jon Nixon

Hannah Arendt The Promise of Education



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Hannah Arendt

The Promise of Education



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Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough ... to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.
(Arendt 1977, 196)

Preface

Arendt was a great public educator. She put at the disposal of the public her huge intellectual resources with a view to analysing the tragedy of the Twenty-First Century and offering whatever hope that analysis might bring to future generations. She wrote mainly in her third language (English, following her native German and then her adopted French) for a European and US readership that had endured WWII and its aftermath and experienced the onset of the Cold War. She lived on the frontiers between the Old World of pre-WWI Europe and the New World of the seemingly ever-expanding US empire.

She wrote only two essays explicitly devoted to education: in ‘The Crisis in Education’ (first published in 1961), which focused on falling educational standards within the US, she argued against what we might now term ‘progressive’ or ‘informal’ educational methods and procedures; in ‘Reflections on Little Rock’ (first published in 1959) she argued against ‘bussing’ policies whereby Black African students were transported by public transport from largely segregated areas in order to ensure integrated schooling (Arendt 1977, 173–196; 2003, 193–213). Her argument was that children should not be used as pawns in political struggles for which adults should take responsibility.

Both essays have tended to brand her as educationally and socially conservative. Each was written in response to specific and highly controversial issues, and later discussion of these two works all too often fails to locate them within the broader context of her thinking and of the social and political situation within which she was writing. (Arendt did, however, remain adamant throughout her life that children should be given a sheltered period for maturation and should not therefore be mobilized for political purposes.) What I shall argue throughout the following chapters is that—if we take into account the complex constellation of concepts with which Arendt was working—the implications of her thinking for education are much broader and deeper than evidenced in her two essays devoted exclusively to the education and schooling of children. We need to grasp her thinking *as a whole*, before we can usefully apply it to our own thinking about education.

So, the purpose of the following reflections on Arendt's thinking is to gather some of the core themes of her lifelong work and focus them on the question, 'What is education for?' The primary themes are *nativity*, *promise* and *plurality*; *thinking*, *judgement* and *action*; and *equality*, *freedom* and the *public sphere*. But these primary themes connect with other sub-themes such as human agency, the unpredictability and irreversibility of human action, and the world as an intersubjective space of shared understandings. Arendt produced no sustained theory or extended argument regarding the nature and purpose of education. Nevertheless, we can—I would argue—infer from the developing constellation of ideas embedded in her vast and varied body of work a notion of education as a necessary preparation for personal fulfilment, social engagement and civic participation. She confronts us with questions that are of huge contemporary relevance.

For Arendt, education is the means whereby we achieve personal autonomy through the exercise of independent judgement; attain adulthood through the recognition of others as equal but different; gain a sense of citizenship through the assumption of our civic rights and responsibilities; and realize our full potential as sentient beings with the capacity for human flourishing and happiness. In order to appreciate the pivotal role that education plays in Arendt's analysis of the human condition, we need to understand the emphasis she placed on thoughtfulness as the measure of our inhumanity. Education sustains and develops the human capacity to think together, to think for oneself (what Arendt called 'the two-in-one' of thinking), and to think from the point of view of others (what she termed 'representative thinking').

The argument advanced in the following chapters takes as its prime point of reference Arendt's 1958 *The Human Condition*, one of her best known and most accessible texts which is organized around the core themes of plurality, promise and nativity. However, the argument also includes reference to other of her major works, in particular her 1951 *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and her 1963 *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, both of which plumb the depths of human 'thoughtlessness', and her unfinished 1978 *The Life of the Mind* (posthumously edited by her friend Mary McCarthy) in which she explores the relation between thinking, willing and judgement as key elements in the human capacity for 'thoughtfulness' (see Arendt 1973, 1978, 1998, 2006). Other of Arendt's works are referred to along the way together with significant related critical and interpretive texts.

Arendt developed neither an overarching theory of education nor any extended exposition regarding the ends and purposes of education. Nevertheless, the particular conceptual constellations that constitute the primary focus of the central chapters of the text yield rich educational insights, ideas as to how institutions of education within the Twenty-First Century might define their role within a democratic polity, and how education might be conceived beyond the boundaries of its traditional institutional contexts.

So, here are some preliminary thoughts which need to be matched against the analyses developed in the following chapters:

- First, education affords the opportunity of new beginnings, of entry into the world of human affairs, and of a remaking of our selves within the ever-broadening horizons of enlarged mentality. It is the means by which students achieve a sense of civic and global responsibility: a sense of citizenship that reaches beyond the legalities of state citizenship to the more complex and fuzzier cross-border politics of what she termed ‘worldliness’—of *reaching out*.
- Second, education is the fulfilment of a binding commitment—a promise—between generations to preserve what is worthwhile in human thought and culture and to expose it to the judgment of posterity. From this perspective, institutions of education are both a repository of received wisdom and informed opinion and the crucible within which such wisdom and opinion is to be challenged and endlessly critiqued, but always with the possibility of reformulation, recapitulation—of *moving on*.
- Third, education is the process whereby we begin to take responsibility for our political destinies. Arendt taught us that we have the capacity to act together, and, in so doing, to make freedom a human reality. But—as she maintained—such freedom is premised on the notion of shared understanding. What she never insisted upon—but what we can infer from her letters and writing—is that the school, the college, the university might possibly be among those institutions that make such shared understanding possible. Not only *reaching out* and *moving on*, but doing so *together*.
- Fourth, education is bigger—and more extensive—than the organizational structures we have established to sustain it. Those structures are crucially important in ensuring an inclusive and informed citizenry: a citizenry with the knowledge and the know-how to challenge half-truths, untruths and downright lies. But education also relies on the lifelong development of our intimate and collegial relationships with others. These relationships also bear the promise of education—of personal fulfilment and social flourishing. Education is—and must be—*transformative* of the organizational frameworks that sustain and maintain it.

Arendt believed in the power of purposeful and collective endeavour. She insisted that power, as opposed to force, is generated when—and only when—people act together in the spirit of shared understanding based on contestable and contested opinion. She provides us with no blueprint of what schools, colleges and universities might look like, but she does provide us with a dire warning that the institutions of civil society—of which the various institutions of education are a cornerstone—are a crucial bulwark against the authoritarian and largely far-right populist movements that are once again achieving a significant presence within the political mainstream.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of Arendt’s life and work and identifies some of the characteristic elements of her own thinking: its responsiveness to world events; its refusal to be confined to any single disciplinary frame; its crossing of professional and institutional boundaries; and its multilingual versatility. Ideas coalesce and form around lived experience. Arendt’s life was at once extreme and at

the same time highly fortunate in that she was caught up in the horrors of the Holocaust, but, almost miraculously, managed to escape it. Throughout her life she was aware of the brutality of totalitarianism, the immense suffering of the Jewish community, and her own, and her mother's, pluck (and luck) in escaping the Holocaust.

The central chapters focus on key themes to which Arendt returned throughout her life: *nativity, promise and plurality* (Chap. 2); *thinking judgement and action* (Chap. 3); and *equality, freedom and public space* (Chap. 4). These central chapters highlight the synergy between these themes, relating them to Arendt's lifelong preoccupation with defining what it means to be human while drawing out their implications for our own understanding of the ends and purposes of education. The themes themselves are a guide not only to the way in which institutions of education *should work*, but as a guide to the way in which education as a practice *does work* when it is transformative and life-enhancing.

Chapter 5 is framed within a broader discussion of how Arendt located her own lifelong education within the context of intellectual friendships, which as a Jewish migrant—and as a stateless person for 18 years of her life—she valued as key elements in her own human development. She lived and worked in and out of institutions of education which undoubtedly sustained her in her career. But she relied crucially—within and outside the boundaries of those institutions—on the kinds of trusting relationships that value honesty and truthfulness, intellectual and emotional engagement, and a sense of lifelong loyalty. Intellectual friendship was for her a way of educating oneself into what it means to be grown-up in a world of human difference, plurality and unpredictability. This chapter focuses specifically on her friendship with the philosopher Karl Jaspers.

I have included as appendices a chronology of Arendt's life and work together with a select bibliography (the latter as an aid to further reading). A more comprehensive selective biography can be found in Dana Villa (ed) (2000, 293–299).

Arendt was a teacher and educator of immense knowledge and experience with the improvisatory skills and communicative understanding to address multiple audiences. She brought to her teaching a deep passion both for the ideas she was developing and the futures of those she was teaching or addressing through her wider readership. As a public educator, she taught primarily through her major published work, but also through her public lectures and occasional writing on contemporary affairs. She lived and worked before the age of social media but reaches out to a world-wide audience. Her ideas have been hugely influential in the field of political philosophy: ideas which, as I seek to show, have huge implications for how we conceive of—and practice—education as a lifelong endeavour.

One final point. Crucial to my argument—and the interpretive approach adopted—is the claim that Arendt's views on education cannot be restricted to her two frequently cited and much discussed essays devoted specifically to education and schooling (important though these may be). If we wish to understand how Arendt's thinking can contribute to educational practice more broadly in the Twenty-First Century, we need to reach beyond her 1959 'Reflections on Little Rock' and her 1961 'The Crisis in Education' and begin to delve into the full corpus of her philosophical and political

thought. This brief introductory text can do little more than provide a few preliminary observations and pointers. But the hope is that readers will be able to delve deeper, explore more fully her core ideas and concepts, and apply their understanding of Arendt to their own practice and the formulation of their own educational purposes within whatever institutional context they are located.

Kendal, Cumbria, UK

Jon Nixon

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A Note to the Reader

Writing in English Arendt typically wrote ‘men’ when she wanted to emphasize not the difference between the sexes but their common humanity. In German, she wrote *Menschen*, without gender specificity, not *Manner*. I have retained her original usage throughout.

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Chapter 1

Arendt as Public Educator



1.1 Introduction

Hannah Arendt was not only a great public intellectual but also a great *public educator*: an exemplar of what it means to be an informed citizen engaging with world events and struggling to reconcile the private and the public, the social and the political, the locally interconnected and the globally interconnected. She had no lifelong institutional affiliations, although she held significant positions as an academic, a commissioning editor, and freelance journalist. She defied easy categorisation. She was above all else a thinker, who took thinking seriously and understood that how we think and what we think about have enormous moral and political implications. She chose to think against the grain and about some of the most intransigent problems that faced humanity in the 20th Century. We live with the consequences of those problems and in the long shadow of her thinking. To understand the implications of that thinking we have to understand something of her life and how that life relates to the times through which she lived.

The opening chapter provides an overview of Arendt's life and work and identifies some of the characteristic elements of her own thinking: its responsiveness to world events; its refusal to be confined to any single disciplinary frame; its crossing of professional and institutional boundaries; and its multilingual versatility. Ideas coalesce and form around lived experience. Arendt's life was at once extreme and at the same time highly fortunate in that she was caught up in the terror of the Holocaust, but miraculously managed to escape it. Throughout her life she was aware of the horrors of totalitarianism, the immense suffering of the Jewish community, and her own and her mother's pluck (and luck) in escaping the Holocaust.

1.2 Origins and Beginnings

Following the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the ensuing Treaty of Versailles, John Maynard Keynes, the foremost economist of his generation, pronounced his verdict on what he saw as the dire consequences of ‘the peace’.

The policy of reducing Germany to servitude for a generation, of degrading the lives of millions of human beings, and of depriving a whole nation of happiness should be abhorrent and detestable – abhorrent and detestable – even if it were possible, even if it enriched ourselves, even if it did not sow the decay of the whole civilized life of Europe (Keynes 2007, 127).

At the time no one in Europe could have known that they were living in the parenthesis between two ‘wars to end all wars’: the years of *l’entre de guerres*. Nevertheless, some had strong intimations to that effect and the prevailing mood was far from cheerful. Three of the now classic texts of literary modernity were published in 1922: T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*. These works marked the emergence of a new sensibility: elegiac in its evocation of the pre-WWI past, anxious regarding the economic, social and political uncertainties of the present, and apprehensive in its presentiment of fear and violence lurking in the future. That presentiment found expression in W. B. Yeats’s chilling image of ‘the second coming’: the ‘rough beast’ of the anti-Christ ‘slouch(ing) towards Bethlehem to be born’ (Yeats 1967, 211).

In Germany history was already aligning itself with Keynes’s prophetic analysis. The Spartacus Group, formed as a radical leftist opposition to WWI, had been quashed. Rosa Luxemburg, who had opposed Germany’s involvement in the war and was a leading figure in radical socialist democratic circles, had been brutally murdered on 15 January, 1919, by members of the *Freikorps*—forerunners of the Nazis—and her body flung into Berlin’s Landwehr Canal. She had, as it was later revealed, been knocked down with a rifle butt by Otto Rung and then shot in the head by Hermann Souchon. She was forty-seven years of age at the time. Her murder—and that of many of her comrades—ended all hope of a social democratic politics in and for Germany and ushered in a decade that was to culminate in the Third Reich (Gietinger 2019; Nixon 2018).

In the months prior to Luxemburg’s murder a widowed mother—and an admirer of Luxemburg—had taken her twelve-year-old daughter onto the streets of Königsberg at the time of the November 1918 uprisings in which the Spartacus Group played a crucial role. The daughter recalls her mother saying to her: ‘You must pay attention, this is a historical moment!’ The daughter—the young Hannah Arendt—would go on to identify Luxemburg as not only a great political activist, but as a significant political thinker who ‘stood for justice and freedom and revolution as the only possibility for a new form of society and state’ (Arendt 2018, 156; see also Arendt 1970, 33–56).

At the time Arendt was living with her recently remarried mother in the house of her newly acquired stepfather and his two daughters by a previous marriage. The re-marriage offered some measure of financial and emotional stability, but assigned the young Arendt to a household that was conservative in its domestic routines and

conformist in its social expectations. The taken-for-granted homeliness no doubt intensified her feelings of estrangement and difference. A young Königsburger called Ernst Grumach, who was five years older than her, told her about his girlfriend Anne Mendelssohn who lived in a town to the west of Königsberg called Stolp. The young Arendt was forbidden to visit Anne because her father who was a doctor had been accused by one of his patients of improper behaviour—a charge which the doctor denied and attributed to the anti-Semitism of the accuser. Arendt, however, was not to be thwarted.

She left her house by her bedroom window at night and made her way to Stolp in time to awaken Anne by throwing a pebble against her window. We know nothing of the ensuing conversation, but the immediate effect on Arendt's family was predictably unsettling not least because it seemed to follow a pattern. Arendt was deemed to be headstrong, independent, and sometimes highly temperamental. The long-term effect of Arendt's determination to act upon her impulse was, however, deeply settling—the friendship with Anne Mendelssohn was close and enduring, lasting until Arendt's death fifty-five years later. Moreover, the pattern of Arendt's adolescent behaviour never seriously breached her mother's intuitive and sympathetic understanding of her daughter's complex personality. Her mother was instinctively—but not uncritically—on her side.

This episode is in many ways emblematic of Arendt's life and thought: impulsive and quixotic, serious and single-minded, confrontational and uncompromising, generous and magnanimous. Always, she impelled herself into situations in such a way that the impulsion allowed no get-out: the consequences were irreversible. In spite of, or because of, being expelled from school at the age of fifteen—for leading a boycott of lessons taught by a teacher who had offended her—Arendt was fearsomely well-read and capable from an early age of prolonged isolated study. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (1982, 32) quotes Anne Mendelssohn as saying that the young Arendt had 'read everything' and comments that 'this "everything" covered philosophy, poetry, particularly Goethe, many, many romantic novels, German and French, and the modern novels considered inappropriate for the young by school authorities, including Thomas Mann's'. Although by no means an auto-didact, Arendt from an early age took control of her own education *outside*—and to some extent *against*—the existing organisational structures of education.

1.3 From Philosophy to Politics

From an early age Arendt sought understanding in and through philosophy. Her doctoral study—completed in 1928 but only published in 1996—had focused on the concept of love as developed in the work of St Augustine and laid the foundations of much of her later thinking. It was in this dissertation, for example, that she sounded one of her major themes: 'the decisive fact determining man as a conscious, remembering being is birth or "natality", that is, the fact that we have entered the

world through birth' (Arendt 1996, 51). Natality—the promise of new beginnings—was to become one of the conceptual cornerstones of her philosophical and political thinking.

Over three decades after the submission of Arendt's doctoral thesis, and shortly after her 58th birthday, she told the journalist Gunter Gaus during a televised interview: 'I always knew I would study philosophy. Ever since I was fourteen years old ... I read Kant ... Jasper's *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* [Psychology of World Views] ... I was fourteen. Then I read Kierkegaard, and that fit together.' (Arendt 1994, 8–9) Arendt does not say that she always knew she would *be* a philosopher, but that she always knew she would *study* philosophy. The distinction is important since at the very beginning of the interview she emphatically rejects Gaus's introductory remarks regarding 'her role in the inner circle of philosophers': 'I neither feel like a philosopher, nor do I believe that I have been accepted in the circle of philosophers, as you so kindly suppose. In my opinion I have said goodbye to philosophy once and for all. As you know, I studied philosophy, but that does not mean that I stayed with it' (Arendt 1994, 1–2).

That is a very emphatic 'goodbye'. Yet, Arendt had studied philosophy, had as we have seen known from the age of fourteen that she would study philosophy, and, when she died eleven years after that interview took place, left behind an unfinished manuscript that was deeply philosophical in its content and its intellectual aspirations (Arendt 1978). So, one is left wondering why, given that she continued to engage with and draw inspiration from philosophy, she felt it necessary to bid such an emphatic farewell to it. It is highly unlikely that she was displaying false modesty—hardly her style—and, although her rejoinder is characteristically combative, she was too serious a thinker to be combative for the sake of it. To what, then, was she saying goodbye? And what did she think she was taking forward through her thought and writing, if not a living tradition of philosophical thought?

By 1964, when the interview was conducted, Arendt knew what she had left behind and why she had left it. In 1920, when on 14 October she had her fourteenth birthday, she could have had no such foreknowledge. But she did know what she wanted to carry forward: the kind of dialogue in which each can understand the inherent truth in the other's opinion. It was a kind of dialogue that she could have with herself, as if 'herself' were another. Indeed, only insofar as she was willing to have that inner dialogue could she be part of the world that was constantly speaking back to itself. 'I have to put up with myself,' she wrote in that earlier essay, 'and nowhere does this I-with-myself show more clearly than in pure thought, which is always a dialogue between the two-in-one' (Arendt 2005, 20). That was why she was reading, at the age of fourteen, Kant, Jaspers and Kierkegaard: not, as it turned out, in the hope of taking a role within 'the inner circle of philosophers', but with a view to joining an on-going conversation about 'the truth inherent in the other's opinion'. It was truth as dialogue that she desired. She was—in this august philosophical company—educating herself.

As we shall see, the *philosophical* turning point of Arendt's intellectual trajectory is its turn away from 'the inner circle of philosophers'. That turning away was partly a matter of circumstance, in that as a Jewish exile she necessarily crossed and re-crossed national, professional and academic boundaries. But it was also a matter

of choice. Faced with what she saw as the necessary contingency of human life, do we turn inward to the world of self or outward to the world of others? Arendt was resolute in rejecting what she saw as the inward turn implicit in Heidegger's and Kierkegaard's reworking of the philosophical tradition and equally resolute in embracing a world of relationality, mutuality and reciprocity; a world characterised, that is, by forms of human interchange organised around values such as cooperation and conditional altruism. She saw the inward turn—associated in her mind with the work of Heidegger and Kierkegaard—as a manifestation of ‘the withering away of everything *between us*’. It was a denial of the human world: ‘the spread of the desert’ as she called it (Arendt 2005, 201; original emphasis). While the philosophers had recognised that we live and move in a desert world, they had assumed that the desert is in our selves. They had internalised it. In so doing they had in her view reduced philosophy to a kind of consolatory escapism.

Arendt was convinced that ‘the withering away’ must be confronted and resisted. The renewal of ‘everything *between us*’—the flourishing of relationality, mutuality and reciprocity—was, for her, the prime end and purpose of politics. However, because we live in ‘desert’ conditions, we need what she called ‘oases’ within which to re-group and sustain ourselves. These oases are under constant threat from, for example, the all-engulfing ‘sandstorms’ of totalitarianism and the ceaseless drift of the desert into our private lives and public spaces. Both collectivism and isolationism encroach upon and erode the political grounds of our being: namely, ‘everything *between us*’. ‘[I]t sometimes seems’, as she put it, ‘as though everything conspires mutually to generalize the conditions of the desert’ (Arendt 2005, 203). However, the ‘oases’ can also be life-giving. ‘Without the intactness of these oases’, claims Arendt, ‘we would not know how to breathe’. It is these ‘oases’ that ‘let us live in the desert without becoming reconciled to it’ (Arendt 2005, 202–203).

The life-giving ‘oases’ include art, love and philosophy, but when and only when these are outward looking and magnanimous in their reaching out to the world: a world that, as conceived by Arendt, is sustained by human labour and given durability through human work. Art, love and philosophy can, as Arendt knew, all too easily turn inward and become self-consuming, but they can also provide necessary meeting places of mutual understanding. She saw education as a necessary gateway from the private world of familial and intimate relationship shaped by the bonds of kinship to the public realm of human affairs shaped by the constitutional requirements of civic engagement. Education provides the resources necessary for youth to attain to adulthood through a gradual and guided process of tutelage aimed at understanding what it means to take responsibility for the world.

1.4 Border Crossings

Arendt's own bonds of kinship were far from straightforward. She had neither brothers nor sisters, and, in October 1913, when she was only seven years old, her father died after having been admitted to Königsberg psychiatric hospital over two years earlier. A few months prior to that her much loved grandfather, with whom she had enjoyed a Sunday morning ritual of story-telling and walks in the park near his home, had also died. This sense of isolation was no doubt compounded by the fact that during her teenage years she seems not to have established a close relationship with either her stepfather or her stepsisters. However, as an only child of a single parent she had an exceptionally strong relationship with her mother.

Prior to 1951, when she gained US citizenship, she had spent much of her adult life as a stateless person, initially in France (to which she migrated via Prague and Geneva in 1933) and then in the USA (to which she migrated in 1941). Her friendships tended to be formed within the artistic and intellectual cadre of the migrant communities within these localities. Given the importance Arendt placed on talk as a constitutive element of friendship, her widening circles of friendship necessarily required an expansion of her linguistic and cultural repertoire: from German (her mother tongue), to French (her language of first exile), to American English (her language of second exile). Because her friends were in the main located in minority and migrant groups within their adopted countries, she and they were often operating across these complex linguistic divides.

After having been arrested and interviewed by the Gestapo, Arendt fled Germany and settled in Paris with her first husband, Günther Stern, who had fled several months before. While in France she worked for organisations that helped Jewish refugees emigrate to Palestine and supplied legal aid to anti-Fascists. She was part of a peer group that was largely German speaking, but cosmopolitan in outlook. Its members were acutely aware of the threat of fascism and its increasingly overt use of anti-Semitic propaganda and of violence directed towards Jews. The group—one of whose members, Heinrich Blücher, was to become Arendt's second husband—dispersed at the outbreak of WWII: some, like Arendt herself, were interned briefly in French camps; some fled to unoccupied territory; all began an urgent search for visas and exit routes; some never made it. The group was never re-formed in its entirety, but the bonds that had been established were to have a lasting influence. For Arendt—and Heinrich Blücher—this group, together with the earlier network formed in Germany, was to form the basis of the inner circle that they would later refer to as their 'tribe'.

Arendt and Blücher escaped France via Marseilles and Lisbon—thanks in part to Albert O. Hirschman and others who, through the Emergency Rescue Committee, maintained an escape route through Marseilles as the Nazis swept across Europe (Adelman 2013). They arrived in New York in May 1941. Arendt's mother followed in June. The situation in France had become increasingly dangerous and was becoming more so day by day. Earlier that year the Front National of the Resistance had been set up and had established a military wing with the express aim of hitting

railway lines carrying men and material to the eastern front, punishing traitors and collaborators, sabotaging factories working for the Germans, and executing soldiers of the occupying forces. A series of coordinated attacks by the Front National—in Rouen on 19 October, Nantes on 20 October and Bordeaux on 21 October—met with extreme and disproportionate retaliation by the Germans.

In New York Arendt became active in the German-Jewish community, writing a column for the German language Jewish newspaper *Aufbau* (1941–45), working for the Commission for European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (1944–46), and visiting Europe on behalf of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (1949–50). She also accepted the senior editorial post at the New York headquarters of Schocken Books, an appointment which together with her free-lance writing brought her into contact with an ever widening and increasingly cosmopolitan circle of academics, artists and intellectuals. Far from being side-lined by or excluded from this widening network, Arendt's former friends gained pre-eminence within it. Anne Mendelssohn, who took French citizenship and settled in France with her husband, remained one of Arendt's oldest and closest friends. It was to her friend from Königsberg that Arendt dedicated her *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* with the inscription 'To Anne, since 1921' (Arendt 1997).

In her frequent visits back to Europe Arendt was punctilious in maintaining earlier relationships—such as those with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers—and ensuring that their potential for friendship was sustained and as far as possible realised. That was far from easy given the deep mistrust that had been generated throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. She believed that the human world, unlike the world of inanimate objects, does not decay with time but gains in significance and vitality through time. New friendships and loyalties are enriching but can never supersede old friendships and loyalties; on the contrary, for Arendt, continuity increases the value of friendship and its potential for constant renewal. Time crystallises and distils.

Many of the new relationships formed in New York developed into enduring friendships and had a significant influence on Arendt's life and thought. They provided a context for lifelong learning. Mary McCarthy, who edited and prepared for posthumous publication Arendt's unfinished *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt 1978), was one such friend. Among these many friendships, that with Jaspers was one of the most influential, shaped by common intellectual interests and a lifelong concern with both the Jewish Question and the question of how Germany was to recover from the moral ignominy of WWII. Their views differed on both matters, but their friendship endured and flourished.

1.5 The Eichmann Controversy

Within the USA, Arendt rapidly gained a reputation as a controversial and outspoken public intellectual. Her article entitled 'Reflections on Little Rock' opposing the federally imposed integration of public schools (consequent upon the US Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* to outlaw school segregation)

was judged so inflammatory by the editors of *Commentary* who had commissioned it that she initially withdrew it from publication. She agreed to publish it with a prefatory note in *Dissent* in 1959. (Arendt 2003, 193–226) Her article entitled ‘Lying in Politics’, a response to the ‘top secret’ document, *The Pentagon Papers*, sections of which were published in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* in 1971, was no less uncompromising and no less controversial in its forensic analysis of the systematic and consistent lying to the American people by government authorities regarding the death and casualty toll resulting from the Vietnam War (Arendt 1972, 1–47).

However, it was her coverage of the trial of the former Gestapo officer Adolf Eichmann that brought her world-wide notoriety. On 9 April 1961 she checked into the Hotel Maria on King George V Street in West Jerusalem to cover the trial for *The New Yorker*. The trial was a highly significant supplement to the Nuremberg War Tribunal of 1945, since it brought to justice a man alleged to have organised the murder of six million Jews. In so doing, it also established the enormity of the Holocaust and the immense scale of the Nazi regime’s project of anti-Semitic genocide. Arendt—a Jewish public intellectual and by this time one of the most prominent political thinkers of her time—was, on the face of it, an inspired editorial choice by William Shawn, the then editor of *The New Yorker*.

Arendt’s account of the trial was published as a five-part article entitled ‘A Reporter at Large: Eichmann in Jerusalem’ in the *New Yorker* during the spring of 1963. Revised, it was published in book form as *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Arendt 2006). It immediately provoked bitter controversy among intellectuals in the United States and Europe and among her wide circle of friends. Within the UK Isaiah Berlin was one of her most influential critics, who used his pre-eminence within the Oxford academic establishment to undermine her reputation and denigrate her work: a use—or abuse—of influence which as Cauter (2013) has shown was not uncharacteristic of this icon of liberalism.

Three issues were crucial in the often acrimonious debate that ensued: Arendt’s obvious antipathy towards the chief prosecutor, Gideon Hausner, whom she saw as a showman concerned less with establishing the specific case against Eichmann than with documenting every wrong that had been suffered by the Jews; her insistence on the collusion of the Jewish leadership—the Jewish Councils—in the deportation of the Jews to the concentration camps and death camps of Eastern Europe; and her characterisation of ‘evil’ as ‘banal’ and of Eichmann as the personification of ‘the banality of evil’. These three elements combined to produce an explosive reaction. The community that had contributed so much to Arendt’s sense of public identity and moral authority was riven by outrage, incomprehension and disappointment by what it saw as her betrayal.

Four decades and a new millennium later Benhabib (2000, 65), a writer sympathetic to Arendt, still found it necessary to point to what she saw as ‘an astonishing lack of perspective, balance of judgement, and judicious expression’ in Arendt’s report on the trial. Arendt’s attitude towards Attorney General Hausner was perhaps the least controversial issue, but it was bound to annoy the government of the Israeli

state and all its friends. Some also perceived in it an element of intellectual snobbery in Arendt's attitude. Indeed, Leora Bilsky seems to hint at a kind of inverted anti-Semitism: 'She was a German from a family that was very educated, middle-class, and Hausner represented to her the "Ostjuden"—the Jews from the East—who talked with great pathos and sentimentality ... and she could not stand it; she wanted calmness and objectivity ... It was a personal disliking there' (Quoted in Rée 2003).

This impression of Arendt being, at the very least, 'off-side' was reinforced by her discussion of the second crucial issue in the debate: the role of the Jewish Councils in the deportation of the Jews. Any suggestion that the Jewish leadership had been willing to collaborate with the Nazi authorities was anathema to those who saw the trial as a means of placing on record the enormity of the crimes perpetrated by the Nazi regime not only against the Jewish people but against humanity. From this perspective the Jews were unequivocally the representatives of suffering humanity, just as Eichmann was the archetype of undeniable evil. So, when—and here we come to the third crucial issue—Arendt presented that evil as 'banal' and characterised Eichmann as the personification of that 'banality', she crossed an invisible line that led to what Amos Elon has described as her 'excommunication' (Arendt 2006, vii–xxviii). 'It seemed', comments Benhabib (2000, 68), 'as if Arendt was accusing her own people and their leaders of being complicitous in the Holocaust while exculpating Eichmann and other Germans through naming their deeds "banal"'.

Neiman (2002, 302), in her powerful study of evil in modern thought, has argued that Arendt's reference to banality was ironic: 'calling evil banal is a piece of moral rhetoric, a way of defusing the power that makes forbidden fruit attractive... The ironic tone she took toward Eichmann was entirely calculated ... To call evil banal is to call it boring. And if it is boring, its appeal will be limited.' What Arendt was struggling with was not only the sense that Eichmann was 'normal' according to his own distorted world view, but that his 'normality' carried with it no awareness whatsoever of the criminal—and a-moral—nature of his acts. Tony Judt, speaking more recently, argues that '[Arendt] gets one thing absolutely right'. In using the phrase 'the banality of evil', he argues, 'Arendt is writing in terms that reflect a Weberian grasp of the modern world: a universe of states governed by administrative bureaucracies themselves subdivided into very small units where decisions and choices are exercised by, so to speak, individual non-initiative'. Inaction thereby becomes action and 'the absence of active choice substitutes for choice itself' (Judt with Snyder 2012, 34).¹

What nobody could fully acknowledge at the time was that it was the norms by which Eichmann had operated, and which he had so thoroughly and unquestioningly internalised, that were monstrous. Half a dozen psychiatrists had certified him as 'normal'. Yet, the prosecution preferred to conclude from occasional lies that he was a liar. In so doing, they had missed, according to Arendt, the moral and legal

¹For an analysis of the continuing relevance of Arendt's reflections on evil, see Patrick Hayden (2010): 'although her concept of evil derives from a specific focus on totalitarianism and genocide, it nonetheless possesses a relevance that reaches beyond the atrocity of the Holocaust to new forms of superfluosity proliferating under the conditions of globalization' (p. 453).

challenge of the whole case: ‘Their case rested on the assumption that the defendant, like all “normal persons”, must have been aware of the criminal nature of his acts, and Eichmann was indeed normal insofar as he was “no exception within the Nazi regime”’ (Arendt 2006, 25–26). Ironically, the prosecution had, according to Arendt’s analysis, failed to grasp the moral and political significance of Eichmann’s ‘abnormality’: namely, the unshakeable belief he had in his own ‘normality’.

Ironical or not, Arendt’s reportage of the trial caused a firestorm. ‘She suffered enormously’, claims Neiman in a later interview: ‘She lost ... many and deep friendships. She was the subject of one of the most violent smear campaigns in the history of twentieth-century intellectual life. And it was enormously painful for her.’ (Quoted in Rée 2003) Moreover, the break-up of some of these friendships was a public—and highly publicised—affair; none more so than her break with Gershom Scholem whose tireless work on behalf of Walter Benjamin and his legacy had complemented her own. Scholem found *Eichmann in Jerusalem* shocking and unacceptable. In a letter dated 23 June 1963 he dismissed the phrase, ‘the banality of evil’, as no more than a ‘catchword’ or ‘slogan’. He charged Arendt with irresponsibly misreading the role of the Jewish agencies under Nazi occupation and with lacking a ‘love of the Jewish people’—*Ahabath Israel*. In her reply to Scholem, she replied that she had never in her life ‘loved’ what she called ‘any people or collective’, but only her friends: ‘the “only” kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons’ (Arendt 2007a, 466–467). But as far as Scholem was concerned, the charge of *Ahabath Israel* disqualified Arendt from any worthwhile insights into either the Holocaust or the Zionist vision. From his standpoint Arendt was henceforth an irrelevance. A handful of letters followed, but the friendship had ended (Arendt and Scholem 2010).

Equally upsetting for Arendt was the reaction of Kurt Blumenfeld. He was one of her earliest and most influential mentors in Berlin and, in the ensuing years, had become one of her oldest and dearest friends with whom she had sustained a lively correspondence. (Arendt and Blumenfeld 1995) Although Blumenfeld was more than twenty years older than Arendt, they enjoyed one another’s company and shared a similar sense of humour. There were many issues on which he and Arendt disagreed—relating, in particular, to his deep commitment to Zionism—but these did not adversely affect the intellectual respect and admiration each had for the other. He had been in close contact with Arendt during her stay in Jerusalem covering the trial, and returned to Israel in early May 1963 to visit him when he was hospitalised with the illness from which he died later that month. Although he had not read Arendt’s articles as they appeared in *The New Yorker*, he had been given reports of these from other sources and was outraged. Arendt felt she had been completely misrepresented and tried to explain to Blumenfeld that her critics were in her view seriously misreading her work. Blumenfeld remained unappeased. Arendt was devastated. As Arendt’s biographer, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, comments: ‘this end to a friendship of so many years was dreadful. She was very shaken after the visit’ (Young-Bruehl 1982, 353).

What her critics and many of her advocates missed at the time was Arendt’s contribution to what Bilsky (2010) has termed the ‘legacy of jurisdiction’ bequeathed

by the Eichmann trial. Although Arendt recognised the jurisdiction of the Israeli court, she had serious misgivings regarding the justification offered by the court in support of its jurisdiction. The issue, for her, was the nature of the crimes committed by Eichmann. She argued that these crimes were primarily ‘crimes against humanity’ and only secondarily ‘crimes against the Jewish people’. ‘It was’, she maintained, ‘when the Nazi regime declared that the German people not only were unwilling to have any Jews in Germany but wished to make the entire Jewish people disappear from the face of the earth that the new crime, the crime against humanity—in the sense of a crime “against the human status,” or against the very nature of mankind—appeared.’ A ‘crime against humanity’, she argued, ‘is an attack upon human diversity as such, that is, upon a characteristic of the “human status” without which the very words “mankind” or “humanity” would be devoid of meaning’ (Arendt 2006, 268–269).

It was not the choice of victims, but the nature of the crime itself, that for Arendt was the crucial point. Had this point been acknowledged, she argued, it would have become clear that ‘the supreme crime’ with which the court in Jerusalem was confronted ‘was a crime against humanity, perpetrated upon the body of the Jewish people, and that only the choice of victims, not the nature of the crime, could be derived from the long history of Jew-hatred and anti-Semitism’ (Arendt 2006). Bilsky provides a crisp summary of Arendt’s position: ‘An attempt to annihilate one group should be understood as an attack on the condition of human plurality’ (Bilsky 2010, 206). Since, for Arendt, plurality is the defining feature of humanity, any attempt to annihilate an integral element of that plurality is not only a crime against the body of the people comprising that element but a crime against humanity itself. Far from belittling the crime, Arendt was—by focusing on the nature of the crime itself rather than the choice of victims—highlighting its enormity. It was, in her view, a crime that should and must be addressed not only by the Jewish people, but collectively by the whole of humanity.

1.6 The Legacy

In 1974 Arendt suffered a heart attack while delivering the Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, UK. A year later she suffered a second heart attack in New York and died on 4 December 1975 at the age of 69, leaving behind her a vast and varied body of work together with the unfinished typescript of her magnum opus, *The Life of the Mind*, the subject of her Gifford Lectures. Arendt (1978) Much of her wide-ranging correspondence with friends and colleagues—notably, Heinrich Blücher, Kurt Blumenfeld, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Mary McCarthy and Gershom Scholem—has also been published in the years following her death. See Kohler (2000), Arendt and Blumenfeld (1995), Ludz (2004), Kohler and Saner (1992), Brightman (1995), Arendt and Scholem (2010).

A defining feature of much of her work is its focus on specific contemporary events that she saw as having significant social and political implications. In all such cases

she framed her analysis within a broad historical perspective and highlighted points of general philosophical and political import: in her intervention in the debate on integrated schooling she reflected on the relation between the state and the individual (Arendt 2003, 193–226); her report on the Eichmann trial provided an opportunity to reflect on the nature of evil (Arendt 2006); while her commentary on *The Pentagon Papers* is among other things a discourse on the relation between truth, politics and deceit (Arendt 1972, 1–47). She was rightly seen as a public intellectual not just because she focused on particular public concerns in the here and now, but because she highlighted the universal and historic significance of those concerns in such a way that they continue to speak to us decades after her death.

Her work is also characterised by the way in which it is informed by her own experience. Of course, that experience was filtered and refined by means of an intense process of reflection—the ‘two-in-one’ of solitary thinking (Arendt 1978, 179–193), the exercise of close and critical reading (Arendt 2007a), and the continuing dialogue with colleagues and friends—but Arendt never loses touch with the experience itself: her first-hand experience of totalitarianism, of exile and statelessness, and of being a Jew in an anti-Semitic society (See, for example, Arendt 1973, 1997, 2007b). These are the themes that drive her work forward and give it a sense of overall coherence notwithstanding the immense range and variety of her writing.

Her essays and articles no less than her major works of conceptual and historical political analysis are all attempts to think through the unthinkable in her own personal history and that of those who were caught up in the events she witnessed. For Arendt, explanatory frameworks are not pre-given. Rather, they are the hard-won outcomes of a long, involved and deliberate process of critical and self-critical thinking. To think, she declared, is to think without banisters:

Even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the customary rules which is morality (Arendt 1994, 321).

1.7 Conclusion

Arendt was a great public intellectual, in that she placed her opinions on public affairs within the public domain and defended them within that domain. But, unlike many European public intellectuals of her era, she was concerned primarily with engendering dialogue and debate, rather than publicising a particular ideological position. She was first and foremost a great *public educator*: more than just a public intellectual, she sought to teach and educate, to lend her mind out, and to provide a model of what it meant to grapple with complex problems. Like Albert Camus whom she greatly admired, she thought through her perplexities without any recourse to premature solutions or eventual absolutions. She taught us to remain—thoughtfully and carefully—in the middle and muddle of history, relying on our own judgement informed

by diverse viewpoints and opinions to find a way through. Arendt left to posterity not only a supreme exemplar of what it means to be a public educator, but also a mode of thinking that resists the security of disciplinary boundaries, that is relentless in its interrogation of untruth and falsehood, and that focuses its theoretical energy on the conceptual distinctions and empirical realities that render truth a possibility. The following three chapters explore the major themes of her work in detail.

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Chapter 2

Nativity, Promise and Plurality: Education in and for the World



2.1 Introduction

Hannah Arendt was one of an illustrious circle of Jewish artists and intellectuals who managed to escape Nazi Germany during the 1930s. Together they formed what the historian Tony Judt described as ‘a very special and transient community, that twentieth-century republic of letters formed against their will by the survivors of the great upheavals of the century’ (Judt 2009, 88–89). Many, of course, never made it, among them Walter Benjamin who died attempting to cross from occupied France into Spain. Among those who did survive were Theodor Adorno, Erich Auerbach, Bertolt Brecht as well as Arendt herself. Each of them shared a similar intellectual and cultural background having studied or worked if not together then in many of the same institutions. Although differing in age each had also experienced the rigours of WWI, the brief and abortive German Revolution that followed and the years of deep economic deprivation that were a consequence of the punitive terms set by the Treaty of Versailles. Working in different fields, on different topics and in different locations each went on to produce work that was to have a huge impact on the arts and humanities and on the social and political sciences for generations to come.

Arendt’s unique contribution to this collective endeavour was as a political thinker who insisted in working outside the frame of any particular discipline and on matters of world-wide concern. She was an uncompromisingly independent thinker who was always attempting to reconcile her republican values—her belief in the public realm as the space of democratic politics—with the pragmatic complexities of *Realpolitik*: how are those values being eroded, denigrated or simply abolished within our current systems of governance? How are they being pushed forward, given a voice, a presence? Crucially, how might we develop a citizenry with the resources necessary to find that voice and insist on that presence? Unforgiving of the atrocities of fascism, as it manifested itself in Nazism, and appalled by Stalin’s atrocious version of Marxism, she sought to articulate a notion of politics that was radically different from both these ideologies—and, indeed, radically different from any political regime based upon the adherence to a particular ideology.

Natality, argued Arendt, is the promise of futurity. We are born into—and develop within the context of—an unpredictable world of human plurality: a world in which we are both equal as human beings and differentiated as human agents. Each of us has her or his own trajectory. In her two essays devoted specifically to schooling and the education of children, Arendt focused on the importance of upbringing as a key factor in the initiation of the child into the adult world, and the responsibility of the adult world to initiate the child into that world (See: Arendt 1977, 173–226, 2003, 193–213). This is undoubtedly an important strand of Arendt’s thinking. But within the context of her broader philosophical and political thought, this emphasis on upbringing should be read against her insistence on the individuality of the individual as formed and transformed—through social interaction and biological maturation—from beginning to closure of mortal life.

The three central chapters (Chaps. 2–4 inclusive) of this introduction to Arendt’s thought focus on key themes to which Arendt returned throughout her life. This chapter—focuses specifically on *natality*, *promise* and *plurality*. The central sections of the chapter focus on education as providing new beginnings; education as a cross-generational promise of ongoing sustainability; and education as a process of critically engaging with the world in all its plurality and diversity. The chapter concludes with questions regarding the implications of this thematic for the practice of teaching and learning and the overall ends and purposes of education.

2.2 New Beginnings

The notion of natality—of human life as a unique beginning—was central to Arendt’s thinking from her earliest doctoral work on love and St Augustine (See Arendt, 1996).¹ It is a core element within an intricate network of concepts that spans her entire corpus: action, appearance, freedom, judgement, labour, natality, plurality, persuasion, power, promise, public space, thinking, violence and work. Her lifelong preoccupation with these concepts—their interrelations and the distinctions between them—is a further characteristic of her work. The pattern changes with each new shift of the kaleidoscope, each new twist of the argument, but the core conceptual elements remain constant (as the central and complementary chapters, i.e. Chaps. 2–4, make clear). She was above all a story-teller who told stories about ideas and their provenance: how ideas emerged through human being and human suffering; through the consequences of our own actions and the consequences of the actions of others.

To understand Arendt’s mode of thought we need to pay close attention to her distinctive use of these concepts. For example, the distinction, as elaborated in *On*

¹For further elaboration of Arendt’s reading of St Augustine—and his influence on her thinking—see the preface and concluding essay (authored by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark) included in Arendt’s *Love and St Augustine* (Arendt 1996). Siobhan Kattago (2013) also pursues this theme in her essay on Arendt’s philosophy of new beginnings.

Violence, between power as empowerment through collective action and force (particularly when expressed through violence) as destructive of power is crucial to an understanding of her thinking as it develops across the full range of her political writing (Arendt 1970a, 44–46). Similarly, her distinction between labour as the type of human activity that is required for human survival and work as the type of activity involved in creating an artificial world where life has some durability and permanence is not only central to the argument developed in *The Human Condition* but underpins all her thinking on the development of human society and the rise of post-WWII consumer society. Work, as distinct from labour, produces the enduring artifacts of civilisation and human culture (Arendt 1998, 79–93).

Natality—the incontrovertible fact of human birth—is vitally connected to Arendt’s notion of action: ‘the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting’. The initial new beginning heralds a unique entry into the human world. Natality, for Arendt, was not just a metaphor. It was a fact: we are born into this world as entirely unique beings—a world that is uniquely changed by our entry into it. But this first birth opens up the possibility of further new beginnings in which the individual enters the world of human action and human agency: ‘In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities’ (Arendt 1998, 9).

Although she stresses the human capacity to begin, to initiate, we do not act in isolation. To act is to assert both one’s common humanity and one’s unique human agency. Through our actions we insert our own distinctive selves into our shared world of human affairs. Although we are born alone into the human world of infancy, we attain adulthood in a second world that we ourselves are responsible for building and sustaining: a world of our collective making. The isolated natal infant cannot make that world. It is a world that can only be made through the collective action of individuals with common interests and a sense of common purpose.

Education was for Arendt one of the doorways into that second world. She made a sharp distinction between the education of children and the education of young adults. Her two essays on the former—‘Reflections on Little Rock’ and ‘The Crisis in Education’—are premised on the assumption that children are as yet unformed and that adults have a responsibility to guide them into the world of human affairs while protecting them from the full blast and turmoil of that world (Arendt 2003, 193–226, 1977, 173–196). This assumption lay behind her highly questionable attack on the federal imposition of integrated schooling, as advanced in ‘Reflections on Little Rock’,² and her reflections, in ‘The Crisis of Education’, on ‘the dangers of a

²In response to ‘Reflections on Little Rock’, Ralph Ellison, the famous black writer, accused Arendt of failing to understand the plight of the Southern Blacks. Arendt subsequently wrote to him acknowledging her error (Young-Bruehl 1982, 316). More recently Danielle S. Allen and Kathryn T. Gines have both written detailed critiques of the argument put forward in ‘Reflections on Little Rock’, pointing out Arendt’s factual errors and highlighting what they see as her misguided opinions America’ (Allen 2004; Gines 2014), while Richard J. Bernstein has acknowledged that Arendt ‘failed to understand the disastrous consequences of hostile political, economic, and social discrimination of Blacks in America’ (Bernstein 2018, 50).

constantly progressing decline of elementary standards throughout the entire school system'. (Arendt 1977, 173).

Her views on the education of young adults—and of the role of the university in that process—were markedly different. What few reports we have of her own teaching style within the university context suggest that she was centrally concerned with enabling her students to think for themselves, express their own opinions, and argue and deliberate with one another. Jerome Kohn, now the pre-eminent Arendtian scholar, studied under Arendt in the late 1960s. In an exchange of letters with Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, another erstwhile student of Arendt who went on to become her biographer, Kohn recalls the experience of being taught by Arendt during that period of student unrest and violent demonstrations against the war in Vietnam:

For this theorist of action, teaching itself was an unrehearsed performance, especially in the give-and-take, what she called the 'free-for-all' of the seminar, where she asked her students real rather than rhetorical questions and responded, usually in entirely unexpected ways, to theirs ... In her seminar, every participant was a 'citizen', called upon to give her or his opinion, to insert him or herself into that miniature polis in order to make it, as she said, 'a little better'. (Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 254–255)

Although sympathetic towards the anti-war demonstrators, Arendt inveighed (in a short work entitled *On Violence*) against what she saw as a 'new shift toward violence in the thinking of revolutionaries' (Arendt 1970a, 15). Violence, for Arendt, was the denial of new beginnings, a violation of natality. What she found particularly shocking was the blurring of the distinction between power and violence (concepts which, as we have seen, she held to be antithetical). She reserved some of her sharpest criticism for Jean-Paul Sartre whom she saw as falsely glorifying violence in the name of empowerment, but had little time for—and little contact with—any of the fashionable Left Bank intellectuals of the day, the exception being Albert Camus whose moral integrity and honesty she greatly admired. (In a letter to Blücher posted from Paris on 1 May, 1952, she wrote: 'Yesterday I was with Camus; he is without doubt the best man they have in France. All the other intellectuals are at most bearable' (Kohler 2000, 164).

Her attitude towards *non-violent* civil disobedience was very different. On 19 February, 1965, she wrote to her friend and early mentor Karl Jaspers regarding the student protests at the University of California, Berkeley, where students were demonstrating for the right to be politically active on campus, to have a voice in university decisions, and to end discrimination against minority students: 'Their organization is superb. In Berkeley they've achieved everything they set out to achieve, and now they can't and don't want to stop.' She added that the students involved in the protests now 'know what it's like to act effectively.' (Kohler and Saner 1992, 583). The campus had become an extension of the 'free-for-all' of the seminar room: an *organised* 'free for all' in which 'every participant was a "citizen", called upon to give her or his opinion, to insert him or herself into that miniature polis in order to make it ... "a little better"' (Young-Bruehl and Kohn 2001, 255).

2.3 The Power of Promise

The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves reveal an agent, but, writes Arendt, ‘this agent is not an author or producer’. Embroiled as we are in ‘innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions’, the outcomes of our actions collide and coalesce in wholly unpredictable ways. Such is that unpredictability, claims Arendt, ‘that action almost never achieves its purpose’ (Arendt 1998, 184). This unpredictability, she maintains, is the price we pay for the irreducible plurality of the human condition: a condition which results from our freedom of will and results in the tangle of unforeseen—and unforeseeable—consequences.

We are, insists Arendt, equal in our shared capacity for action, new beginnings; but distinct in the particular actions that define our unique trajectories:

Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they would neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. (Arendt 1998, 175–176)

Human beings can minimise the impact of the unpredictability implicit in the condition of human plurality by acting in concert and thereby reducing the clash of conflicting wills and intentions. When we act in this way we generate what Arendt understands by power, the ‘only limitation [of which] is the existence of other people ... [H]uman power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with’ (Arendt 1998, 201).

But power is ‘dependent upon the unreliable and only temporary agreement of many wills and intentions’ unless provided with the durability and potential permanence of binding agreements that stand as a bulwark against the uncertainty of the world (Arendt 1998, 201). Arendt wrote of such agreements with reference to ‘the power of promise’, the effect of which is ‘the enormous and truly miraculous enlargement of the very dimension in which power can be effective’ (Arendt 1998, 245). We cannot predict or control the future by virtue of our binding promises, but we can begin to shape and work towards a common future. It is that dimension of temporal enlargement—‘the enormous and truly miraculous enlargement’—that gives validity to the promise.

Institutions cannot be reduced to organisations. They are the embodiment of the kinds of promises to which Arendt is here referring: promises regarding, for example, our health and wellbeing, our access to justice, the right of every child and young person to a basic education. Without our hospitals, law courts, schools and universities, the practices we associate with these institutions would lack the wherewithal for development over time. We may criticise our institutions, but, without them, the promises they embody would be baseless. Their existence as the cornerstones of liberal, democratic society vindicate Edmund Burke’s famous definition of society as a partnership ‘not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born’ (Burke [1790] 1961, 110).

Although Arendt herself did not make the connection, we might view institutions of education as the embodiment of a promise given by one generation to succeeding generations to pass on whatever truths—albeit partial and provisional (but always hard-won)—have been gathered from the ongoing practice of research, scholarship and teaching. *Therein lies the promise of education*. Of course, such truths are constantly revised, challenged and refined by the coming of the new and the young. Indeed, without those new beginnings truth would wither into irrelevance, and, over time, become an untruth—or, even worse, one of the old lies used to justify the morally indefensible. Nevertheless, the responsibility of each generation to pass on the goods of its collective learning, and, in so doing, expose them to the scrutiny of future generations, remains of paramount importance. You do not have to believe in institutions as they currently exist and function to believe in association as a bedrock of human society—institutions are founded on our capacity to associate and think, work and live together.

In Mary Douglas's (1987) classic text, *How Institutions Think*, she explained how institutions have a hold on our processes of classifying and recognising; how they predispose us towards particular ways of thinking and doing; how they influence what we do when and how; how they define the parameters of social space and temporality. Richard Sennett, in his still highly relevant work on the corrosion of character within the post-Fordist workplace, paints a similar picture of the collapse of institutional association into organisational functionality and routinisation. 'At a certain point,' he argues, 'routine becomes self-destructive, because human beings lose control over their own efforts; lack of control over work time means people go dead mentally' (Sennett 1998, 37).

So what is *educational* about institutions that define themselves as institutions of education? And—equally important—what is *institutional* about such institutions? Arendt's answer to both questions, I would argue, is that institutions of education are committed to truth and trust: the valuing of truth that lies at the heart of education and of the trust that sustains our institutional life. Truth and trust are complementary. Without trust there can be no truth, and without truth there can be no trust. The promise of education is the promise to enable an emergent citizenry to distinguish between truths, half-truths and lies and to sustain the trust upon which truth-telling relies.

In her essay on 'Truth and Politics' Arendt drew a distinction between 'rational truth' and 'factual truth'. 'Facts and events', she argued, 'are infinitely more fragile things than axioms, discoveries, theories—even the most wildly speculative ones—produced by the human mind'. Moreover, she insisted, once a 'factual truth'—as opposed to a 'rational truth'—is lost, no rational effort will ever bring it back:

Perhaps the chances that Euclidian mathematics or Einstein's theory of relativity—let alone Plato's philosophy—would have been reproduced in time if their authors had been prevented from handing them down to posterity are not very good either, yet they are infinitely better than the chances that a fact of importance, forgotten or, more likely, lied away, will one day be rediscovered. (Arendt 1977, 231–232)

In highlighting both the vulnerability and significance of 'factual truth' Arendt anticipates Edward W. Said's insistence that the prime task of the intellectual is 'to

protect against and forestall the disappearance of the past', and, through the practice of research, scholarship and teaching, to stand against 'the invidious disfiguring, dismembering, and disremembering of significant historical experiences that do not have powerful enough lobbies in the present and therefore merit dismissal or belittlement' (Said 2004, 141).

The urgency of that task is highlighted in Richard J. Bernstein's stark reminder of what can happen to societies that blur the distinction between truth and untruth:

What happened so blatantly in totalitarian societies is being practiced today by leading politicians. In short, there is the constant danger that powerful persuasive techniques are being used to deny factual truth, to transform fact into just another opinion, and to create a world of 'alternative facts'. (Bernstein 2018, 74)

But truth can only be valued by those who have a disposition towards truthfulness. We may differ as to what personal qualities constitute such a disposition and how they are acquired, but without them—and the possibility of them being acquired and re-acquired by successive generations—it would not be possible 'to protect against and forestall the disappearance of the past'. Arendt herself placed great emphasis on what she saw as the *existential* nature of truth: its manifestation in the human dispositions and qualities that are unique to a particular individual and that are the expression of that person's truthfulness.

In accepting the Lessing Prize of the Free city of Hamburg in 1959, she spoke of Lessing's philosophical legacy not only in terms of his ideas but in terms of his unique personal qualities, chief among which she identified as his openness to 'incessant and continual discourse':

He was never eager really to fall out with someone with whom he had entered into a dispute; he was concerned solely with humanizing the world by incessant and continual discourse about its affairs and the things in it. He wanted to be a friend of many men, but no man's brother. (Arendt 1970b, 30)

Similarly, in her 1957 piece honouring the life and work of Karl Jaspers, she wrote of her friend and former mentor as a uniquely generous individual who in his limitless communicability embodied the core principle around which his work cohered:

The principle itself is communication; truth, which can never be grasped as dogmatic content, emerges as 'existential' substance clarified and articulated by reason, communicating itself and appealing to the reasonable existing of the other, comprehensible and capable of comprehending everything else ... Truth itself is communicative, it disappears and cannot be conceived outside communication. (Arendt 1970b, 85)

Without the active engagement and interaction of human minds, facts, axioms and theories are reduced to mere 'dogmatic content'. Truth requires an ethos, a complex of dispositions—a culture of curiosity and inquiry, of critical discourse and argumentation—if it is to speak to the future and allow the future to speak back.

One of Arendt's great achievements as a public educator was to open up the institutional spaces within which such a culture might develop and flourish. Her own New

York apartment—shared with Heinrich Blücher—became a hub of intellectual dialogue and conviviality; Schocken, the New York publishing house where she worked as editor in the late 1940s, became a major focus for new ideas and cultural exchange; and, of course, the seminar room and lecture theatre became—under her tutelage—a place of dialogue in which ideas were developed and challenged, questions asked and explored, and students encouraged to think for themselves.

Arendt, like so many of her generation, witnessed the world descend into the bleakest inhumanity. The emergence of totalitarianism, was, she argued, an event without precedent and fell outside all the existing moral and political categories; outside any existing conception of criminality. The task for her generation was, she believed, to reclaim our shared humanity—our capacity for new beginnings—and restore it for future generations. That task is as urgent now as it was then. Now, as then, authoritarianism is on the rise, anti-pluralist rhetoric grows ever more strident, and the anti-politics of majoritarian populism erects ever more boundaries (Galston 2018; Graziano 2018; Kakutani 2018; Müller 2017). Education offers no panaceas; no easy solutions; no certain certainties. Nevertheless, Arendt was adamant that education is where each generation must start if it is to set about the task of reclamation, and, in so doing, fulfil its promise to succeeding generations.

2.4 Education *Within* and *for* the World

‘Education’, Arendt wrote,

is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. (Arendt, 1977, 196)

The implications of this statements are clear for all those who have responsibility for the education of ensuing generations. First, there is a responsibility of educators to enable those they educate to love and engage with the world they inherit; to see it as it is while identifying the changes necessary to save it from the false or no longer applicable assumptions and received wisdoms of the past; to define the parameters of hope and expectation. Second, and perhaps most important, is the urgency of this task. The task of renewal, Arendt reminds us, is essential if we are not to face the ruination of the world; the destruction of the human world as we know it; and, with that destruction, the emergence of atomised forms of alienated existence devoid of social interaction or political engagement. What was at risk, Arendt insisted, was the world of human affairs and social interaction: a world that has to be recreated by each succeeding generation.

What does this mean in practice for those of us living in the first quarter of the 21st century? It means that institutions of education should listen and respond to and help articulate the views of their students and pupils. In terms of teaching and learning, this requires interpretive pedagogies that recognise and respect difference of viewpoint and opinion and that involve open discussion and dialogue. In terms of

the curriculum it points towards negotiated and collaborative forms of provision that meet the perceived needs of students. In terms of the governance of learning it points to greater community, pupil and student engagement at every level of educational provision.

It means, also, that governments should provide the funds necessary for institutions of education to fulfil their historic role. Within the UK, for example, there is currently a chronic underfunding of schools and of institutions of higher education. This is quite simply a disgrace: one of the wealthiest countries in the world unable to offer adequate and equitable educational provision for its next generation and with educational and economic inequalities accruing for ensuing generations. No government of either a centre-left or centre-right orientation should be able to tolerate this situation.

Finally, it means that systems, sectors and regional officiates should reach out across borders to create new ways of working together. This might involve new forms of partnership involving, for example, schools, colleges and universities at the local level, institutional partnerships based on mutual goodwill and financial cooperation at the national level, and modes of student and scholarly exchange at the international level. Many of these new beginnings are already in place, but they require political will and public support to ensure their sustainability.

The implications for the teacher—at every level of education from early years education through to higher education—has been clearly and beautifully spelt out by Wiercinski (2011, 109) in his portrayal of what he terms ‘the hermeneutical teacher’:

In a process of education, what can be transferred is the testimony of our own thinking. Education is foremost about testimony, about sharing the experience of being human, sharing life, convictions, and knowledge. In its deepest existential sense, education is a call to transform our life by exercising openness toward the other and the unknown. It is an ethics of embracing the strange, the negative, without silencing the differences. In this respect education is about living diversity.

Living diversity, insisted Arendt, means learning to live *within* and *for* the world—and education is the space within which we make of that world a space of mutual understandings, common meanings and shared practice.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the relation between three core concepts in Arendt’s thinking—natality, promise and plurality—and related these concepts to our own understanding of the ends and purposes of education. Arendt’s analysis leaves us with questions and lines of inquiry that we must pursue in the context of a world radically different from her own.

These include—as possible pointers for future deliberation, discussion and thinking—the following:

How can education encourage and protect the alternative viewpoints and opinions of young people who are inheriting a world vastly different from that of their parents and teachers?

How can we all—cross-generationally and internationally—find ways of thinking *together* while respecting one another's differences?

How can—and should—educators counter prejudice within their classrooms and institutions? How can they actively promote not only tolerance but recognition of others?

How can we reassert the paramount importance of truth—and truthfulness—in any attempt to build social cohesion and civic trust?

How can institutions of education—at every level of provision, from early years to higher education—reach out to their publics and gain a sense of community trust and engagement?

How—through the processes of teaching and learning—can we foster modes of agreement-making that acknowledge cultural, religious and social difference? How, in a world of difference, can we learn to live together?

In the following chapter (Chap. 3) we shift towards an emphasis on education for human agency. This shift of conceptual focus requires a consideration of Arendt's lifelong preoccupation with the intimate but complex relation between thinking, action and judgement. Of course, these clusters of concepts—these ways of understanding our sense of being and belonging in the world—are not mutually exclusive. As we move forward, we gather the foregoing analysis into a broader discussion of Arendt's notion of what it means to be a sentient and responsible human being.

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Chapter 3

Thinking, Judgement and Action: Education for Human Agency



3.1 Introduction

In dark times thoughtfulness becomes an indispensable resource of resistance and hope. Without it there can be no considered judgement and no concerted action based on deliberation and the weighing of alternatives. Education, argued Arendt, is a space devoted to thoughtfulness: a protected space for the young, a more robust forum for those moving into adulthood. She would have warned against any suggestion that we are born thoughtful. Rather, we are thoughtful through our initiation into, and participation in, a supportive environment of learning that withstands the thoughtlessness of routinized behaviour and the blandishments of thinking divorced from ‘the world as it “really” is’. To be thoughtful is to be grown up, and to be grown up is to learn how to understand—and engage with—the world ‘as something that is shared by many people’ (Arendt 2005, 128).

Thinking was Arendt’s lifelong occupation. She was committed to thinking through the topics that engaged her, rather than to developing theories that could be stated as outcomes. Indeed, she saw the finality of any theory—or closed system of thought—as a potential danger to human freedom. She knew from her own experience that thinking is often conducted in solitude, that its consequences may be dangerous, and that it is always deeply discursive—and she wasn’t troubled by the seeming paradox that thinking can be at once discursive and at the same time solitary. She knew that to think is to think together. She was a thinker for whom thinking offered the promise of new beginnings.

Thinking, argued Arendt, is an innate human capacity. It enables us to have present in our minds a multiplicity of standpoints in a process she called ‘representative thinking’. This innate and defining feature of humanity means that our mental horizons are not static and fixed, but constantly shifting and expanding. ‘It is’, she maintained, ‘this capacity for an “enlarged mentality” that enables men to judge.’ (Arendt 1977, 241); and it is this ability to form judgements that opens up the possibility of what Arendt understands by human action, as opposed to routinized behaviour or mindless activity. If thinking involves a withdrawal from the public realm of human

action, judgement marks the specific point of re-entry: the point at which purposeful, considered action becomes a possibility.

In her final unfinished work, *The Life of the Mind*, she distinguished between—while at the same time highlighting the complementarity of—thinking as internal dialogue (the ‘two-in-one’ of thinking as she put it) and thinking in dialogue with others. In both cases different viewpoints and standpoints are, in her terms, ‘represented’ in the thinking process; a process, which, she insisted, is grounded in common experience: ‘not a prerogative of the few but an ever-present faculty in everybody’ (Arendt 1978, I, 191). Indeed, she developed a profound suspicion of any kind of thinking that risks trapping the thinker within what she saw as a closed, monological system.

The three central chapters of this introduction to Arendt’s thought (Chaps. 2–4 inclusive) focus on key themes to which Arendt returned throughout her life. This chapter focuses specifically on *thinking*, *judgement* and *action*. The central sections of the chapter focus on the role of thinking within the educational process; the notion of thinking as ‘enlargement of mind’; and the crucial relation between education and the achievement of human agency. This chapter—like the previous chapter—concludes with some crucial questions regarding the implications of this thematic for the practice of teaching and learning and the overall ends and purposes of education.

3.2 Thinking and *Thoughtlessness*

Arendt’s suspicion of any kind of thinking that entraps the thinker formed the basis of her 1946 assault on the ‘terminological façade’ and ‘obvious verbal tricks and sophistries’ that characterised Heidegger’s *magnum opus* (Arendt 1994, 176). *Being and Time* was, she claimed, marred by Heidegger’s use of ‘mythologising and muddled concepts like “folk” and “earth”’ (Arendt 1994, 181). Later—in a handwritten journal entry dated July 1953—she likened Heidegger to a fox attempting to lure potential victims into a trap which none of them can enter because the fox is itself trapped within it (Ludz 2004 304–305). Even when, years later in a 1969 radio broadcast, she sought to excuse Heidegger’s Nazi past, she did so on the grounds that his residency in his own exclusive world of thought had made him a stranger to the wider world of human affairs. In defending Heidegger she was forced to highlight what for her was a serious deficiency in his thinking: its self-absorbed *unworldliness* from which—like the fox in her earlier journal entry—he was unable to escape (Ludz 2004, 160–162). For Arendt, thinking was of the world, worldly; and, as such, was nothing if not dialogical.¹

That is why the notion of ‘thinking’ played such an important part in Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism. Her 1951 *The Origins of Totalitarianism* characterised both Nazism and Stalinism as deeply dehumanising in their denial of the human

¹For a highly authoritative reading of Arendt and Heidegger—and of some of the Heideggerian roots of Arendt’s political thinking—see Villa (1996).

capacity for thinking (Arendt 1973). Later, in her highly controversial coverage of the Eichmann trial that culminated in her 1963 *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she famously employed the phrase ‘the banality of evil’ to describe what she saw as Eichmann’s unquestioning adherence to the norms of the Nazi regime (Arendt 2006). In concluding from the occasional lies and inconsistencies in his courtroom testimony that Eichmann was a liar, the prosecution had—she argued—missed the moral and legal challenge of the case: ‘Their case rested on the assumption that the defendant, like all “normal persons”, must have been aware of the criminal nature of his acts’—but, she added, Eichmann was normal only insofar as he was ‘no exception within the Nazi regime’. The prosecution had, according to Arendt’s analysis, failed to grasp the moral and political significance of Eichmann’s ‘abnormality’: namely, his adherence to the norms of the regime he had served and therefore his lack of awareness of the ‘the criminal nature of his acts’ (Arendt 2006, 26).²

Later, in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt returned to a consideration of the Eichmann trial. (Arendt 1978, I, 3–6) Indeed, she used her earlier analysis of that trial as the springboard for what were to be her final reflections on the ethics of thinking. A world devoid of thinking, willing and judging would, she argued, be a world characterised by ‘thoughtlessness’ and inhabited by automatons such as Eichmann who lacked freedom of will and any capacity for independent judgement. If Heidegger had represented the unworldliness of ‘pure thought’, then Eichmann represented the unworldliness of ‘thoughtlessness’. Neither Eichmann in his ‘thoughtlessness’ nor Heidegger in his ‘pure thought’ connected with the plurality of the world as Arendt understood it.

The only notable characteristic she could detect in Eichmann ‘was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*’. He had displayed a complete ‘absence of thinking’, which, as she disturbingly pointed out, ‘is so ordinary an experience in our everyday life, where we have hardly the time, let alone the inclination, to *stop* and think’ (Arendt 1978, I, 4. original emphases). In Arendt’s view, his ‘banality’ left him no less culpable—and rendered the death sentence no less justifiable—but it shifted the basis of the argument against him: if he was a monster, then his monstrosity arose from an all too human propensity towards *thoughtlessness*.

That raised for Arendt a crucial question: ‘Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually “condition” them against it?’ (Arendt 1978, I, 5). The question arose in large part from her experience of totalitarianism, but also from her experience of political oppression under McCarthyism in 1950’s USA and more generally from the ideological battle lines that defined the

²Given what is now known of Eichmann’s past in Germany and his life in Argentina where he lived when he escaped from Germany and boasted about his role in the Final Solution, Arendt’s judgement on Eichmann himself may be seriously questioned. Christopher Browning, the distinguished historian of the Holocaust, has written: ‘Arendt was fooled by Eichmann’s strategy of self-representation in part because there were so many perpetrators of the kind he was pretending to be’. However, Browning also maintains that Arendt’s concept of ‘the banality of evil’ remains an important insight. (Browning 2003, 3–4).

Cold War. She also viewed with increasing concern the unthinking consumerism and the assumption of ever increasing affluence that fuelled the American Dream prior to the stock market crash of 1973 and the oil crisis that followed later that year. Neither Hitler's Nazism nor Stalin's Communism had, it would seem, exhausted the full potential of totalitarianism. So, the question remained urgent and pressing even within the heartlands of the democratic super-power of which she was now a citizen.

The question raised by Arendt is no less pressing within our own particular dark times, and might be expressed in the following terms: Could the activity of thinking be among the conditions that actually condition us against the claims of political populism? Could thinking, by its very existence, challenge the claim that there is a single 'voice of the people', an all-encompassing 'will of the people'? Could it, by its very existence, represent those who are excluded from that all-encompassing generality: the dissenters, the newcomers, the outsiders? Could it, by its very existence, question the untruths, half-truths and downright lies that are perpetrated in order to uphold the claims of populist rhetoric?

Arendt would seem to suggest that thinking, then as now, is up to the task—at least the words she wrote towards the end of her life would seem to suggest so:

When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action. In such emergencies, it turns out that the purging component of thinking (Socrates' midwifery, which brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them—values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions) is political by implication (Arendt 1978, I, 192).

In order to appreciate how—by drawing out the implications of unexamined opinions—thinking is 'political by implication', we have to understand the conceptual relation, as defined by Arendt, between thinking, action and judgement: a relation that is fundamental to her re-working of Kant's notion of the 'enlargement of mind' and informs her notion of 'representative thinking' and of the 'two-in-one' of thinking. It is to her last, great but unfinished work that we must again turn for an elaboration and clarification of these ideas.

3.3 Judgement as 'Enlargement of Mind'

The tripartite structure that Arendt had envisaged for *The Life of the Mind* focused on thinking, willing and judging. In the event only the first two of those three conceptual building blocks were put in place, with the result that the work lacks not only a detailed discussion of the third element but also an overarching argument as to how the three concepts are related within the overall scheme—and, crucially, how these concepts are related to her notion of action. In posthumously editing the work, her close friend Mary McCarthy included as an appendix to the second volume excerpts from Arendt's lectures on Kant's political philosophy that had a particular bearing on the notion of 'judgement'. Arendt's comments in these relatively brief extracts

suggest that she considered judgement to be an indispensable element in enabling us to think politically.³

Arendt linked the human capacity for judgement to what—following Kant—she termed 'enlargement of the mind' (Arendt 1978 II, 257). It is only by comparing our own judgements with other possible judgements that we develop our capacity for discrimination. Unlike thoughts, judgements are therefore *always* public. This distinction between thinking and judging is crucial: whereas thinking involves a necessary element of keeping oneself company, judging invariably presupposes the company of others; while thinking pulls towards 'the duality of the two-in-one' of solitary thought (Arendt 1978, I, 187), judging is firmly located in what Arendt had earlier termed 'sharing-the-world-with-others' (Arendt 1977, 221). Judgements are in effect claims that are seeking assent, but may be challenged. For that reason a judgement—even when couched in terms of an assertion—invariably involves an element of persuasion. 'To judge', as Dana Villa (1999, 98) puts it, 'is to engage in rational public dialogue, deliberating with others with whom I must finally come to an agreement and decision'. (See, also, Villa 2001; 2008)

In the excerpts from her earlier lectures on Kant's political philosophy included in *The Life of the Mind* Arendt insists on what she terms the 'basic other-directedness of judgement':

Judgement, and especially judgements of taste, always reflect upon others and ... take their possible judgements into account. This is necessary because I am human and cannot live outside the company of men ... The basic other-directedness of judgment and taste seems to stand in the greatest possible opposition to the very nature, the absolutely idiosyncratic nature of the sense itself (Arendt 1978, II, 266)

Arendt had already covered some of this conceptual ground in a 1967 essay that she had written in response to the controversy following her coverage of the Eichmann trial.⁴ In that essay—written in response to the controversy following the trial—she wrote: 'Political thought is representative. I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them.' She went on to argue that this process of representation 'does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else'. Rather it 'is a question ... of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not'. Finally, she claimed that 'the more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinions' (Arendt 1977, 241).

Imagination, claimed Arendt, is the faculty that allows us to feel and think as if we are in another's place. This faculty 'makes the others present and thus moves potentially in a space which is public, open to all sides; in other words, it adopts the

³These lectures have subsequently been published with a scholarly introduction by Ronald Beiner. (See Arendt 1992).

⁴Entitled 'Truth and Politics', the essay was published in *The New Yorker* and reprinted in the second 1968 edition of *Between Past and Future*. (See Arendt 1977, 227–264).

position of Kant's world citizen' (Arendt 1978, II, 257). As conceived by Arendt, imagination is diametrically opposed to both fancy and ideology. Both deny the public: in the case of fancy, by turning away from its externality; in the case of ideology, by violating its plurality. The imagination alone—drawing its inspiration from, and finding delight in, the plurality and specificity of the world—affirms the public through its willingness to reach out and accept its hospitality: 'To think with the enlarged mentality—that means you train your imagination to go visiting' (Arendt 1978, II, 257).

In its interconnectedness and engagement, reading becomes paradigmatic of 'the enlargement of the mind'. For example, reading Kafka requires us to connect his life, work and context; to go beyond identification with a single character in order to grasp the underlying structure of the work; and, crucially, to bring our own passion for truth to the act of reading (Arendt 2007, 94–109). We judge Kafka—as we would any modernist writer or artist—not only by the demands that his work makes on us as readers, but on our capacity as readers to meet those demands. Any judgement is, therefore, a judgement on the one who is judging as well as on that which is being judged: a judgement, that is, on the imaginative capacity—the capacity for 'enlargement'—of the judging mind.

The world, for Arendt, was an intersubjective reality that—in its objectivity—both divides us and unites us. What was of paramount importance to her was our own capacity to construct the world in such a way as to ensure that the centre holds; that the complementarities of division and unity hold firm. That was why the conceptual trinity of thinking, willing and judging as the precondition of human agency and action was of paramount importance to her: thinking is rooted in the inwardness of our being in the world; willing asserts our selfhood within and to the world; and judgement reaches out to engage with the world as it presents itself to us externally and objectively. It is within the world—and only within the world—that we are capable of 'the enlargement of mind' that makes us fully and complicatedly human.

3.4 Education for Human Agency

Arendt was adamant that thinking and acting are distinct and that judgement is something different again. (With Sartre clearly in her sights, she was dismissive of public intellectuals, who, as she saw it, confused thinking with political action.) Nevertheless, thinking and action are vitally connected. Her notions of 'representative thinking' and 'enlargement of mind', writes Villa (1999, 88), 'point to the faculty of judgement as a kind of bridge between thought and action'. Only when thinking has done its work and judgements have been formed does action begin; but, conversely, '[o]nly when action has ceased and words such as courage, justice, and virtue become genuinely perplexing does thinking actually begin' (Villa 2001, 19). It is by thinking that we form judgements; that by forming judgements we enter the public sphere; and that by entering the public sphere we constitute a citizenry, a *polis*, and thereby open up the possibility of concerted action.

What binds together thought, action and judgement is the notion of plurality. '[W]e know from experience', writes Arendt in her 'Introduction *into* Politics' (which formed the basis of a course she gave at the University of Chicago in 1963), 'that no one can adequately grasp the objective world in its full reality all on his own, because the world always shows and reveals itself to him from only one perspective'. She continues:

If someone wants to see and experience the world as it 'really' is, he can do so only by understanding it as something that is shared by many people, lies between them, showing itself differently to each and comprehensible only to the extent that many people can talk *about* it and exchange their opinions and perspectives with one another, over against one another (Arendt 2005, 128, original emphasis).

To understand the world is to comprehend it in all its plurality. Only through a process of shared comprehension can we begin to form judgements which position and define us within that world. When these judgements coalesce around common interests, individuals achieve the collective agency necessary for concerted action.

This dialectic of thinking, judgement and action lies at the heart of Arendt's political thought as it developed in the wake of her pioneering *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt 1973). It suggests the need for an in-between space in which thinking, judgement and action are allowed free play: a safe space between the private world of solitary thought and the public world of human action; a space in which opinions can be aired and judgements tested. Friendship, as I have argued elsewhere, constituted for Arendt one such in-between space which enables individuals to flourish together (Nixon 2015). Education provides a similar space: a privileged space in which to venture out, test the water, and think with 'enlarged mentality'.

Education was for Arendt the doorway into 'the world as it "really" is'. It is the space within which people begin to 'talk *about* [the world] and exchange their opinions and perspectives with one another, over against one another'. It is the in-between space where we are able to negotiate our way from the private space within which childhood is nurtured and protected and the public space of adult responsibility and citizenship: a space in which to question and challenge, to imagine the world from different standpoints and perspectives, to reflect upon ourselves as unique persons who share a common world.

But education can only provide this in-between space if it remains uncluttered by what Arendt saw as barriers to thought. There were—and are—a number of such barriers.

- The first is the assumption that the outcomes of thinking can be pre-specified—that we can think things through to a pre-specified (and therefore predetermined) end or goal. Against this assumption, Arendt insisted—in her 1967 essay on 'Truth and Politics'—that 'our thinking is truly discursive, running, as it were, from place to place, from one part of the world to another, through all kinds of conflicting views' (Arendt 1977, 242). Thinking is heuristic and explorative, unpredictable in its outcomes, uncertain and indeterminate. It falls outside the frame of pedagogical approaches or assessment regimes premised on the notion of pre-specifiable goals, targets, and outcomes. Insofar as we understand institutions of education as places

within which we learn to think and—and, in so doing enlarge our minds—then those approaches and regimes need to be re-aligned with practices of teaching, learning and assessment that place the emphasis on interpretive modes of thinking, and that reassert the central importance of the humanities and the liberal arts within the school, college and university curriculum.

- The second barrier relates to notions of academic categorisation. Arendt understood the importance of disciplinary and methodological boundaries, but was aware that these boundaries could all too easily become barriers. In her own life and work she insisted on the need to think outside—and between and across—the traditional academic categories: ‘thinking without banisters’, as she called it. Having publicly and emphatically distanced herself from philosophy (as recounted in Chap. 1) she never settled into an established discipline, but constantly crossed and re-crossed the boundaries between historical analysis, philosophical reflection and political theory.
- Third, and closely related to the previous point, is the barrier erected by premature specialisation. Arendt was a great European and trans-Atlantic humanist and intellectual who was able to rove across the realms of history, literature, philosophy, political theory and the arts, while developing significant analyses of the impact of scientific and technological development on the natural and human world. That degree of circumspection and rounded vision coupled with a daunting command of detail is what makes her major works, her essays and occasional pieces so compelling and persuasive. In retrospect she can be seen as someone, who, although having been taught within a very different educational system, exemplified the virtues of a broad-based, liberal arts tradition of education, whereby people gain a sense of who they are, who they want to become, and what they may or may not want to achieve.
- Fourth, is the barrier of deep inequality structured into our system of education where access to higher education in particular—and thereby entry to the professions—is skewed towards the privately educated. Implicit in all Arendt’s thinking is the belief that education is a public good. Private gains may be derived from it, but public education remains of supreme importance in ensuring the sustainability of a democratic society comprising an educated, engaged and inclusive citizenry. Without such a citizenry, democracy as Arendt understood it becomes hollowed out, and, when it becomes a hollow shell, as she explained in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the risks are huge and the implications wide-ranging. An educated citizenry is a bulwark against populist charmers, charismatic demagogues, and authoritarian charlatans: a bulwark much needed in these troubled times.

Arendt’s lifelong preoccupation with thinking, judgement and action highlights the need for approaches to teaching and learning that recognise difference and diversity, that challenge, question, stimulate and provoke; for curriculum frameworks that are open and inter-connective, flexible and responsive, negotiable and provisional; and for educational purposes that focus on dispositions and qualities, on human flourishing, and on the fulfilment of individual potential. Above all, Arendt reminds us that education is a public good; that the more we participate in it the greater its

potential contribution to the wellbeing of society as a whole and the vibrancy of the body politic. Against those who maintain that education is a commodity bought and sold for private gain, Arendt insists that it is grounded in our shared capacity to think—and that to think is to think *together and in difference*.

The collective problems we now face are increasingly global in scope and as such require collective solutions which in turn require the capacity and the will to think across our differences. As those differences become sharper and more intractable—particularly in the context of the rise of populism with its politically nationalist, economically protectionist and culturally xenophobic tendencies⁵—it is worth bearing in mind Arendt's insistence that thinking is ordinary. It is the one faculty that binds us together while allowing us the freedom to become ourselves. In a deeply divided world our capacity for thinking together—practical reasoning, *phronesis*—is the most valuable resource available.

Institutions of education are among the few remaining places within which that resource can be valued unconditionally. They are also—crucially—places in which we learn to think in such a way as to distinguish well-founded beliefs from wishful thinking; to distinguish less well-founded beliefs from more firmly founded beliefs; and to understand why such distinctions matter. In our current context—no less than that in which Arendt insisted upon the ethical and political significance of thoughtfulness—thinking matters. For Arendt, thinking was always critical. The notion of critical thinking was, for her, a tautology. Because thinking is always critical; always dialogical; always progressing through distinctions, exploring the intricacies of disagreements, sailing to its goal of consensus through the various side winds of *dissensus*. Only through the long, hard slog of *thinking together* in and through difference can truth be attained and preserved.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the relation between three core concepts in Arendt's work—thinking, judgement and action—and related these concepts to our own understanding of the ends and purposes of education. Again (as in Chap. 2), Arendt leaves us with questions and possible lines of inquiry that require a response from within our own particular place and time.

These include the following questions, pointers and openings to further discussion and deliberation:

⁵ As referenced in Chap. 2, see Galston (2018), Graziano (2018), Kakutani (2018) and Müller (2017) on the threat of populism and the endangering of truth.

How does *thoughtlessness* manifest itself in contemporary society? How can we recognise it? How can we draw ourselves and others into a state of attentive *thoughtfulness*?

How, as teachers and learners, can we encourage collaborative ways of working? How can we balance collaboration and competition, individual freedom and social responsibility, thinking for ourselves and thinking *together*?

How might institutions of education encourage forms of collective action that reach out to the wider concerns of society?

How can educational professionals—in whatever walk of life—encourage and develop their own and others' independent judgement based on an understanding of divergent viewpoints and conflicting evidence?

How can they/we ensure that decisions are informed by evidence-based and independently informed judgement?

How can education enable individuals to flourish as unique individuals each of whom has respect for the uniqueness of the other?

In the following chapter (Chap. 4) we shift towards an emphasis on education as a preparation for citizenry. This shift of conceptual focus requires a consideration of Arendt's lifelong preoccupation with the intimate but complex relation between equality, freedom and the public sphere. Of course, these clusters of concepts—these ways of engaging with the world—are not mutually exclusive. As we move forward, we gather the foregoing analyses (as developed in Chaps. 2 and 3) into a broader discussion of Arendt's notion of how—as social creatures—we achieve political maturity.

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Chapter 4

Equality, Freedom and the Public Sphere: Towards an Educated Citizenry



4.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters (Chaps. 2 and 3) have focused on key themes to which Arendt returned throughout her life. This chapter focuses specifically on *equality*, *freedom* and the *public sphere*. The central sections of the chapter focus on the idea of equality as the recognition of difference; the paradox of human freedom exercised in a world of competing freedoms; and the notion of an educated citizenry. Again, this chapter—like the previous two chapters—concludes with some crucial questions regarding the implications of this thematic for the practice of teaching and learning and the overall ends and purposes of education. But it also involves a shift towards issues and questions that focus on the public sphere: issues that necessarily require some political and social contextualization, particularly as these relate to lifelong educational provision and the conditions necessary for an informed and active citizenry.

Strong democratic societies require educated and informed publics that are both inclusive and questioning. Within such societies, knowledge is the most public of all public goods—and education, therefore, is an indispensable resource, the benefits of which cut across a range of public interests and concerns. The more complex the society, the wider that range becomes; and the wider the range of public interests and concerns, the greater the need for public goods generally and for the public good of education in particular. From this perspective, higher education is a public good because it contributes to the development of an educated public with the capabilities necessary to fulfil the human potential of each of its members and of society as a whole. In so doing it also contributes—both directly and indirectly—to economic stability which might be seen as a public good in its own right.¹

That was the rationale for the massive post-WWII expansion of higher education—an expansion premised on the notion of higher education as a public good. Within the UK seven new universities—East Anglia, Essex, Kent Lancaster, Sussex, Warwick

¹For an elaboration of this argument see Nixon (2011, 2015).

and York—were announced in 1961; two years later, in 1963, the Robbins Report recommended further expansion of the higher education sector; and, in 1971, the newly established Open University enrolled its first cohort of students.² Judt (2010, 394) highlights both the rapidity and the extent of this expansion across post-WWII Europe: ‘by the end of the 1960s, one young person in seven in Italy was attending university (compared to one in twenty ten years before). In Belgium the figure was one in six. In West Germany, where there had been 108,000 students in 1950, there were nearly 400,000 by the end of the Sixties. In France, by 1967, there were as many university students as there had been *lycéen* in 1956.’ As he concludes, ‘all over Europe there were vastly more students than ever before’.

The argument for higher education as a public good found its logical expression in this vast expansion of student numbers within the UK and US, across Europe—and, indeed, globally. This expansion is continuing phenomenon. As Varghese (2012, 36) notes, ‘enrolment in higher education totalled 152 million in 2007, and has doubled every 15 years starting from 1970’. However, it was—and is increasingly—the cost implications of this logic that have generated controversy: if education is deemed to be a public good, is the argument for its cost being borne either by individuals or by for-profit providers diminished? Should public goods incur private costs? If public goods are privately purchased, do those goods thereby lose their public value? Indeed, can they continue to be categorised as public goods?

Having accepted, in the boom years, the irresistible logic of the argument for expansion and widening participation within higher education, we in the UK are left in these post-2008 ‘austere’ times (although much less austere in reality than when state welfarism was inaugurated in the post-WWII period) with its unavoidable legacy: the paradox of an increasingly *privately* funded educational system conceived as a *public good*. In the face of that conundrum (how can and do private gains add up to a public good?) the economic question of affordability in a highly competitive educational marketplace assumes overriding importance—as does the question of what equality means in a deeply unequal society.

Inequalities in schooling provision reinforce the inequalities in society at large, with entry to the top posts in the most prestigious professions loaded in favour of those who are not only privately educated but educated within the most expensive and well-endowed private schools. The funnel effect whereby the privately educated gain a disproportional share of places within the most academically prestigious universities has the further effect of ensuring that they fill not only a disproportionate number of posts within the older professions but also a disproportionate number of top posts within those same professions. The deep codes of structural inequality are not only maintained and reproduced, but result in ever more discriminating and selective organisational structures at every level of the educational system and across an increasingly unequal and divided society (see Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission 2019).

²For a thorough and comprehensive study of the 1960’s universities, see Pellew and Taylor (2020).

4.2 Equality and Difference

Arendt did not base her belief that we are all equal on some abstract notion of *sameness*: the idea that we are all equal because we are in some way the same. On the contrary, she believed that we are all of equal worth, but individually distinct. We are of equal worth by virtue—not in spite of—our inherent and acculturated differences as well as the differences we affirm and embody. We have therefore to find ways of living together in a world of difference.

From an Arendtian perspective, that is the point and purpose of education: to enable us to live together in mutual recognition of difference, dissent and sometimes deep disagreement. Education is the portal into a democratic polity that respects—and listens to—minority views. The uniqueness of the individual—the individuality of the individual—has to be nurtured, and it is the role of education to enable and support that process of flourishing whereby the individual enters into society and becomes an active citizen. Arendt saw this educational process as one of conservation:

it seems to me that conservatism, in the sense of conservation, is the essence of the educational activity, whose task is always to cherish and protect something—the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new. (Arendt 1977, 192)

Education thereby becomes a protected space, but one dedicated to the protection of freedom: a space within which we learn to recognise and respect difference. As such, it is a space which requires endless and perpetual renewal: not a closed space, but space within which, as she put it, '[t]he immigrants, the newcomers, are a guarantee to the country that it represents the new order' (Arendt 1977, 175). If she was conservative in cherishing and protecting 'the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old', she was radical in her insistence that this protected space should be open and inclusive: a harbinger of 'the new order'.

She was, of course speaking of the USA—then, not now: the home as she saw it of the newcomers and the immigrants, the place that had granted her as a newcomer and an immigrant a sanctuary and citizenship. But she might also have been speaking of the UK that in the post-WWII period at least claimed to offer a guarantee of outward-looking inclusivity. Racism was widespread in post WWII Britain, but government policies were at least tending towards one nation conservatism and/or social democratic labourism. The thirty years following WWII—*Les Trente Glorieuses*—constituted a radical and historic experiment in international cooperation based on the principles and pragmatics of social democracy.

The situation as we move into the third decade of the 21st Century is fundamentally altered. A new economic protectionism and an entrenched social conservatism has taken hold in the USA, while far-right political parties have re-emerged as a powerful voice within and across the mainstream of European politics. Trade wars—initiated by powerful superpowers—have taken the place of the old 'Cold War' that dominated the geopolitics of the third quarter of the 20th century. Within the UK, a xenophobic rhetoric deployed by public figures arguing for Britain to leave the European Union

at whatever economic and political cost has been peppered across the social media and entrenched within the commentary and reportage of the right-wing British press (not the entirety of the British press, but a large part of it). The populist challenge to liberal democracy now takes the form of an anti-pluralism that Arendt would have found abhorrent. (See Galston 2018, for an analysis of the populist threat to pluralism).

According to this influential—and, sadly, increasingly powerful—world view, the conceptual unity of equality and difference, *equality as the recognition of difference*, is put at serious risk: the risk of losing a society that is welcoming, outward looking and magnanimous—and, crucially, of losing a system of public education that is cosmopolitan, unconditionally inclusive, and *really useful* in its encouragement of individuals to become themselves, to know where they might and might not want to go in life, and to envisage the kind of persons they might want to become. ‘Democracy’, as Müller (2017, 3) puts it, ‘requires pluralism and the recognition that we need to find fair terms of living together as free, equal, but also irreducibly diverse citizens’.

4.3 The Paradox of Freedom

The paradox of freedom is that in possessing and owning my own freedom of will I run the risk of limiting your freedom of will. In exercising my own freedom I come up against the unpredictability of human plurality. My freedom of will and my capacity to exercise that freedom clashes with those of myriad others in ways that are wholly unpredictable. That unpredictability, Arendt maintained, was part and parcel of the human condition. Defined by our individual freedom of will, we nevertheless have to confront and live with the freedom of others to choose and act differently, and, in so doing, disrupt whatever view of the world we may be in the process of settling into. That is, for Arendt, the point at which education steps in—the point at which we have to sit round the table (to draw on one of Arendt’s favourite metaphors), seek to understand one another’s differences, and begin to work through our disagreements.

Arendt fully acknowledged that freedom is necessarily two-edged. It affirms the value of individual agency and autonomy, but, since any single person’s human agency and autonomy is as worthwhile as that of any other person, it inevitably leads to conflicts of interest and to unforeseen outcomes as the consequences of diverse actions and decisions coalesce and collide. Thus the emphasis on freedom inflects towards, on the one hand, *individual* autonomy, and, on the other hand, the need for collective action based on deliberative modes of thinking *together*. Education within a democratic society bears the weight of this duality: how to allow the individual to flourish as an individual agent while ensuring that the flourishing of each contributes to the common good of society as a whole. Whether this inherent tension presents itself as potentially resolvable or irreconcilably dichotomous depends hugely on an informed—and therefore educated—citizenry operating through the established institutions of democratic engagement.

All human exchanges are located on a spectrum of exchange involving a trade-off between cooperation and competition. At one end of that spectrum are win-win exchanges which are overtly reciprocal and at the other end are winner-takes-all exchanges in which there is no reciprocity. In the middle ground between these extremes—the ground of *realpolitik*—lie various forms of zero-sum exchanges whereby one individual's or group's gain becomes another's loss. But even zero-sum exchanges—unlike winner-takes-all exchanges—entail a certain degree of cooperation in terms of setting the ground rules and playing according to those rules. Moreover, as Sennett (2013, 84) puts it, 'win-lose is seldom total and absolute; instead the winner will leave something for the loser'. Without that 'something'—that grey area of betwixt and between—all exchange ceases and with it any possibility of the winner capitalising on the winnings.

It is in this rough, in-between ground—where cooperation and competition achieve a fragile balance—that we learn reciprocity; learn, that is, to recognise one another as autonomous agents and to value mutuality. As humans we are born into a condition of helplessness, in which we are reliant on others for our nurture and survival: 'the prolonged helplessness of the human infant marks its history', as Nussbaum (2001, 182) puts it; 'and the early drama of its infancy is the drama of its helplessness before a world of objects'. That condition requires of us a need to acknowledge this external world upon which we are reliant, and—in order to achieve autonomy—understand ourselves in relation to it. Our uniquely prolonged period of infant helplessness goes hand in hand with the uniquely rapid growth of emotional and intellectual intelligence associated with that same period of infancy. We are learning to navigate the rough ground from day one—beginning, that is, to construct a common world.

The construction of such a world begins with that early experience of coming to terms with 'a world of objects': learning how to acknowledge it and navigate it; achieving a sense of wonder and curiosity about it; becoming less fearful of it; reconciling ourselves to it through argument and dialogue. Education is, at best, part and parcel of this long haul of learning to live together, if not in some ideal nexus of win-win exchanges then at least in some middle ground that allows for the mutual recognition of equal worth—a process that begins at birth and continues into the early years of schooling when the social dimension of learning is of vital importance. As that process follows though into the years of compulsory and post-compulsory education, the emphasis on deliberation and dialogue becomes ever more important: learning how to disagree; how to achieve workable agreements; how to move forward into collective action, how to cope with the unintended consequences of our own and others' actions. Schools, colleges and institutions of further and higher education that value and sustain that process are what Honneth (2014) terms 'institutions of recognition' and fulfil what Arendt understood as the rightful role of institutions of education within a liberal democratic society.

Such institutions value the social dimension of learning, acknowledge the indeterminacy of learning outcomes, and celebrate the surprising, the speculative and the unexpected that are inherent in the process of learning. Education is centrally concerned with encouraging and sustaining a passion for truth and a disposition towards

reasoning together. Such reasoning relies crucially on a shared sense of purpose. But that sense of purpose cannot be reduced to a set of pre-specified ‘goals’ or ‘targets’. It is revealed—and fulfilled—through the process of reasoning together in a spirit of trust and truthfulness. It is by virtue of that process that we learn to live together in difference and disagreement, and, by so doing, construct the conditions necessary for the sustainability of a common world.

So, the authority of the teacher, carries with it a particular kind of responsibility: ‘The teacher’s qualification consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about it, but his authority rests on his assumption of responsibility for that world’ (Arendt 1977, 189). The educator is neither *an authority* (in the sense of representing the totality of knowledge and understanding) nor *in authority* (in the sense of facilitating access to that totality). Rather, the educator is an explainer, an interpreter: an ambassador for a world into which we are all—whether children or adults—in the lifelong process of complex initiation. Growing into a world of difference is—as Arendt reminded us—an immensely complicated hermeneutical task. But it is do-able.

The arts and humanities are crucial in this respect. As Nussbaum (2010) has argued, ‘democracy needs the humanities’ (see, also, Nussbaum 1997). Edward Said (2004) also devoted the last authored book published in his lifetime to a deeply reflective defence of ‘humanism and democratic criticism’, and, in an earlier essay, gave a ringing and high-minded (in the best sense of that latter term) endorsement of the idea of the teacher as an ambassador of inquiry, discussion and exchange:

To say that someone is educated or an educator is to say something having to do with the mind, with intellectual and moral values, with a particular process of inquiry, discussion, and exchange, none of which is encountered as regularly outside as inside the academy. The idea is that academies form the minds of the young, prepare them for life, just as—to look at things from the point of view of the teacher—to teach is to be engaged in a vocation or calling having principally to do not with financial gain but with the unending search for truth. (Said 1996, 215)

The argument is not that technical and vocational modes of learning are irrelevant or that employability is unimportant, but that these emphases need to be framed within a broader educational perspective: a perspective that values the cultivation of the whole person through the development of particular dispositions or habits of mind. One such disposition orients us towards a questioning and interpretive orientation towards the unintelligible, unfamiliar or strange. Viewed in this broader context, education disposes us towards an enlarged mentality: an inquiring and inclusive world view.

We need such a world view as never before. At the local, regional and global levels we now face stark choices between a defensive rejection of what is unfamiliar and different and the attempt to confront it and understand it. In an increasingly interconnected but deeply fractured and unequal world those choices are of paramount importance. Education cannot be neutral on these matters. The humanities require that we adopt a hermeneutical stance to the world—and that we do so not just as an espoused principle, but as a mode of day-to-day practice, a way of being in the world, of living our lives, of dwelling in uncertainty.

We teach one another and learn from one another throughout our lives: in formal and informal situations with family and friends, spouses and lovers; in collegial contexts with fellow workers and associates; and across a range of institutional and extra-mural settings. Education, although formally located within particular institutional boundaries (schools, colleges, universities, conservatoires, etc.), is rooted in daily interaction and reaches out to the public sphere. Education is centrally concerned, argues Arendt, in providing that necessary bridge between the private world of familial affairs, the institutional settings of education, and the public world of human affairs.

Education is centrally concerned with reaching out.

4.4 Towards an Educated Citizenry

Arendt insisted on the public sphere as a ‘guarantee against the futility of individual life, the space protected against this and reserved for the relative permanence, if not immortality, of mortals’ (Arendt 1998, 56). Within the public sphere—what for the Greeks was the *polis* and for the Romans the *res publica*—‘the people’ constitute not a single voice, but a buzzing plurality for which critical thought and the exercise of free will are of paramount importance. She firmly rejected the notion of a ‘general will’: a generalised will abstracted from the will of individualised agents. Indeed, she argued that it was precisely this notion of a ‘general will’ that had led to the tragic failure of the French Revolution. By dissolving individual free will into an undifferentiated generality, it denied its own libertarian precepts (Arendt 2006, 50). For Arendt, the prime purpose of education was to enable each individual to develop the capabilities and dispositions necessary to enter the public sphere as independent minded citizens.

In affirming the plurality of the public sphere Arendt was acknowledging both the individuality of the individual and the equal worth of each individual within that sphere. To acknowledge this plurality is to reject the claim that ‘the people’ can be reduced to a single voice (‘the voice of the people’) or a generalised will (‘the will of the people’) as evoked in the ever increasing hubbub of populist rhetoric. It is also to reject the claim—implicit in that populist rhetoric—that all those who are not in tune with this single voice or generalised will are an entirely negative or deficit element within the body politic.

The *polis* as conceived by Arendt comprises neither a homogeneous mass in which all voices speak as one nor an exclusionary zone from which any voice deemed to be out of tune is automatically excluded. It is, rather, a civic space in which all individuals are deemed equal by virtue of their citizenship and each is acknowledged to be different by virtue of her or his freedom of will: a space dependent upon the free interchange of opinion and reliant on the respect of all parties for a distinction to be drawn and maintained between truth and untruth in the expression of their opinions. When that distinction is lost, or deliberately blurred or flouted, the *polis* is put at incalculable risk—as it clearly is with the rise of Donald Trump in the USA, Nigel

Farage in Britain, Marine Le Pen in France, Jaroslaw Kaczyński in Poland, and the Hungarian prime minister Victor Orbán.³

To acknowledge the plurality of the public sphere is to reject the claim that any one group has a monopoly on the truth. Truth is what we arrive at through a process of deliberation involving the ongoing testing and challenging of contrasting and sometimes conflicting judgements. Truth does not fall outside the world of human affairs, but is constituted within it as an ongoing process of agreement-making that is forever being re-worked and re-fashioned. To seek to derail this process through the twisting or distortion of the truth for political gain is not only undemocratic, but, in Arendt's terms, anti-political in that it renders inoperable the deliberative infrastructure upon which politics is founded.

Truth, argued Arendt in her analysis of the Pentagon Papers (leaked to the *New York Times* in 1971 and revealing the extent of the state cover-up of the death and casualty toll resulting from the Vietnam War), is one of the foundation stones of democratic politics. It is 'the chief stabilizing factor in the affairs of men', without which the *polis* is—as history shows—at risk of descending into totalitarianism:

This is one of the lessons that could be learned from the totalitarian experiments and the totalitarian rulers' frightening confidence in the power of lying – in their ability, for instance, to rewrite history again and again to adapt the past to the 'political line' of the present moment or to eliminate data that did not fit their ideology. (Arendt 1972, 7)

Untruth disempowers and ultimately disenfranchises the recipients of untruth; it discredits and ultimately corrupts the purveyors of untruth. Truth alone empowers.

Truth does not appear unbidden. The sifting of truth from untruth—from wishful thinking, wrong-headed belief, deliberate evasions, downright lies, etc.—presupposes the human capacity for what Arendt understood as thoughtfulness: a capacity which she saw as deeply dialogical (the 'two-in-one' of thinking, as she put it); as inclusive of divergent views and opinions (what she termed 'representative thinking'); and as fundamental to human flourishing (as elaborated in her notion of 'enlargement of mind') (Arendt 1978, I, 179–193; 1977, 241; 1978, II, 257). To be thoughtful, argued Arendt, is to engage in the world of human affairs and thereby become worldly. To be unworldly is to be thoughtless and thereby disengaged from the world. Without the thinking person the *polis* is unthinkable.

But not all ways of thinking route us through from the 'two-in-one' of solitary thought to the dialogical process of thinking whereby we are able to engage with the world. Throughout her life and work Arendt struggled to develop and practice a way of thinking that was in her terms 'worldly': a way of thinking that, while confronting the banality of thoughtlessness (and its all-too-easy collusion with evil), rejected the allurements (very real for a person of Arendt's intellectual disposition) of purely abstract thought. In order to understand the moral and ethical premium Arendt placed on thoughtfulness, it is—to return to one of the central themes of the previous chapter—necessary to understand how and why she distinguished it from the unworldliness of, on the one hand, *thoughtlessness* (as exemplified in the person

³On Brexit and Trump, see, for example, Barnett (2017), Harding (2017) and Schier and Eberly (2018); on the re-entry of the far right, see Fekete (2018) and Neiwert (2017).

of the Nazi operative Eichmann) and, on the other hand, *pure thought* (as expressed in the life and work of the Nazi apologist Heidegger)

Education is about understanding ourselves well enough to steer clear of either of these two polarities. Worldliness—the knowledge of how the world works in all its complex diversity—was Arendt’s grounding principle. Without worldliness there can be no informed citizenry, and without an informed citizenry there can be no *polity*, and without a *polity* there can be no democracy—and, crucially, no hope of a continuing democracy for future generations. To become educated is to become a distinct part of an informed citizenry, with all the responsibilities that entails.

4.5 Conclusion

Chapter 4 has explored the relation between three core concepts in Arendt’s work—equality, freedom and the public sphere—and related these concepts to our own understanding of the ends and purposes of education. Again (as in Chaps. 2 and 3), Arendt leaves us with questions—and possible lines of inquiry—that require a response from within our own particular place and time.

These include the following questions and opportunities for further inquiry and deliberation:

What are the institutional and professional implications of defining equality in terms of the recognition of difference? What does it mean to be equal but different?

How would educational policies and practices (and organisational systems and structures) based on the notion of equality as the recognition of difference be distinguishable from those based on the notion of equality as sameness?

How can differentiation work within the practice of teaching and learning? Is it possible to differentiate in terms of learning needs while operating within a comprehensive system of mass education? If so, how?

How can we educate for responsible and truthful citizenship? Is truth something that we import into the deliberative process or what emerges from it? Or is it something entirely different? How can institutions of education prioritise truth-telling and truthfulness?

How can education contribute more fully to the formation and development of an educated and informed citizenry within a pluralist and increasingly diverse society?

Does the notion of education as a public good have any resonance within an increasingly private—and privatised—society?

In the final chapter (Chap. 5) the focus shifts from an elaboration of some of Arendt's core concepts and their relevance for educational practice to a discussion of the role of intellectual friendship in sustaining that practice within the broader framework of lifelong learning. The chapter focuses on a lifelong relationship—progressing from the formalities of doctoral supervision, through mentorship and early friendship, to a lifelong sharing of ideas—between Arendt and the philosopher Karl Jaspers who did much to shape post-WWII Germany and our idea of post-WWII Europe.

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Chapter 5

Education and Intellectual Friendship: Mutual Flourishing



5.1 Introduction

The final chapter is framed within a broader discussion of how Arendt located her own lifelong education within the context of intellectual friendship and collegial loyalty. As a Jewish migrant—and as a stateless person for eighteen years of her life—she valued friendship with men and women as a key element in her own human development. She lived and worked in and out of the institutions of education which undoubtedly sustained her in her career, but she relied crucially—within and outside the boundaries of those institutions—on the kinds of trusting relationships that value honesty and truthfulness, intellectual and emotional engagement, and a sense of lifelong loyalty. Intellectual friendship was for her a way of educating herself into what it means to be grown-up in a world of human plurality and unpredictability.

Friendship was central to Hannah Arendt's life and work—and her sense of what it means to become an educated person. It provides an in-between space that acknowledges the need for intimacy while not becoming exclusively private, and admits the public while retaining a degree of inclusivity. Friendship is based on reciprocity. Her lifelong friendship with the philosopher Karl Jaspers was an exemplary instance of one such relationship. Having its origins in a highly formal academic relationship—in which Jaspers acted as doctoral supervisor and academic mentor to Arendt—it developed into a deep friendship within which they shared a lifelong passion for dialogue and disagreement on almost all the major political issues of the time. Their recorded correspondence from 1926 to 1969 is a rare example of sustained friendship between two public intellectuals sharing their sometimes opposing views on contemporary world events (see Nixon 2015, 85–107).

The purpose of this chapter is to present this friendship as an instance of a sustained dialogue between two public intellectuals whose thinking helped shape our understanding of the twentieth century. It was a dialogue in and of its time, framed by the unique concurrence of two competing totalitarian regimes and conducted in the context of immense geopolitical upheaval and uncertainty. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this dialogue through friendship is its continuity. For forty-three years

Arendt and Jaspers maintained a vibrant and energetic correspondence focusing on both world affairs and the various scholarly projects in which each was involved.

I attempt to communicate something of that vibrancy and energy, while also exploring the implications of intellectual friendship for how we might conceive of education within the context of a whole way of life. Education, for Arendt, was not circumscribed by the four walls of the institutions she attended as a pupil and student, or those she taught and lectured within. It was a lifelong process involving engagement with other viewpoints and opinions, other ideas and arguments, other books and art forms, and—above all—other people: people with whom one might disagree on even fundamental issues, but with whom one shares a common bond of seeking to achieve some common ground.

The relationship between Arendt and Jaspers constituted one of the spaces within which Arendt honoured that common bond and sought to achieve that common ground. Friendship was deeply educative for Arendt—particularly, as in the case of her relationship with Jaspers, it grew from her experience of doctoral supervision, through mentorship, to lifelong correspondence—a correspondence which is pre-eminent in the recorded dialogues between leading European intellectuals in the context of WWII and its aftermath (see Kohler and Saner 1992).

But in order to understand that intellectual friendship we need to understand something about the person with whom she maintained a lifelong correspondence—a man of contradictions.

5.2 Jaspers: A Man of Contradictions

Jaspers' early life prior to meeting Arendt was characterised by his chronic ill health, his relationship with his family and with his brother in particular, and his deep commitment to Gertrud Mayer whom he married in 1910. He was a man full of contradictions: an intensely private person who lived and flourished through his relationships with others; a German patriot who demanded that post-war Germany acknowledge its own guilt and restore itself from the basis of that acknowledgement; a psychiatrist who rejected the psychiatric categorisation of mental disorder; a philosopher who sought to de-philosophise philosophy. For Arendt, Jaspers personified a philosophical outlook that insisted on 'the fact that not Man, talking to himself in the dialogue of solitude, but men, talking and communicating with each other, inhabit the earth' (Arendt 1970, 90).

Jaspers was born on 23 February 1883 in Oldenburg which is located in the north western region of Germany. In 1901 he began studying law at the University of Freiberg. However, his studies at Freiberg were interrupted by his being diagnosed as suffering from bronchiectasis (an obstructive lung disease). Jaspers used this interruption to his studies as an opportunity to persuade his family (and his father in particular) that his association with the law faculty had been an error of judgement and that he wished to pursue his academic studies through empirically grounded scientific enquiry. His ultimate goal as he saw it was philosophy, but he

saw his own route to that goal not through the study of law but through the natural sciences. With his family's financial and moral support he switched to studying medicine at the University of Heidelberg. While Heidelberg remained his main base, he also spent some time at the Universities of Munich, Berlin and Göttingen, before passing the medical state examination in 1908 with a doctoral dissertation on the theme of 'homesickness and crime': the interplay, as we might now see it, between belongingness and criminality.

Between the diagnosis of his medical condition and the completion of his doctoral thesis, three significant occurrences had intervened that were to shape his life and intellectual career. The first and most significant of these occurrences was his meeting with Gertrud Mayer on 14 July 1907. He was twenty four and she was four years older. Within a month they became secretly engaged and openly married on 29 September 1910. Their secret engagement may be partly explained by the fact that she belonged to a devout Jewish family while his family was nominally Protestant. Her more outward going personality and love of the arts complemented his more solitary lifestyle and his early commitment to science. She helped him to develop as a more rounded character.

Later, as part of an autobiographical sketch which Jaspers presented on a German television network in 1966–1967, he recalled his first meeting with Gertrud as a lightning strike:

During this visit something like a bolt of lightning struck us both. This occurred in the very first moment when Gertrud, still with her back toward me, got up and turned to face me. It was as if in this moment two people met who had been bound to each other since time immemorial. (Jaspers 1994, 524)

The second significant occurrence was his encounter with the visual arts that infused his relationships and his work with a new vigour and creativity. Jaspers first visited Paris with Gertrud in 1912. Here—at the museum in the Jardin du Luxembourg—he had his first encounter with the Impressionists: Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley in particular. Later that year Jaspers visited the International Art Exhibition in Cologne where he viewed work by van Gogh, Cezanne and Gauguin. Jaspers was by no means a newcomer to art, since his father was a serious painter and he had been brought up with a deep respect for the visual arts. But his introduction to Impressionism, which was at the time still highly controversial, was deeply liberating in new and unexpected ways. He saw in the texture of van Gogh's paintings—in, for example, the pattern, pace and intensity of brushstrokes—the need that the artist felt to depict reality through his expression of that reality. It was a reality hit head-on: an inter-subjective collision rather than a reality that one made prior sense of and then objectively depicted.

The third occurrence was the breakdown of his relationship with his younger brother, Enno. The two brothers had never enjoyed an easy relationship, but in 1907—when Enno was eighteen and Jaspers twenty four—Enno wrote to his brother accusing him of avoiding direct contact with others and implying that he was using his illness as a means of avoidance. Jaspers, on the other hand, increasingly saw Enno as profligate and ill-disciplined—or, as he put it in a letter to his parents in 1926: 'He

cannot do anything with himself and is seized by a greed for entertainment, activity and adventure that are only to be satisfied with financial means that are considerable' (Quoted in Kirkbright 2004, 104–105). Each was to some extent the other's *alter ego*, but the relationship never seems to have settled down into amicable complementarity. On the contrary, the differences increased and the tensions intensified as they grew into adulthood.

After two bankruptcies and an increasing dependency on heroin, Enno finally committed suicide in 1931. Jaspers had tried to support him through his heroin addiction and the severe financial problems that in turn had serious consequences for the family finances. However, in what was to be the final year of Enno's life, Jaspers suggested to his sister that they should refuse the sum of money requested by Enno from the family estate and instead provide a more limited allowance. Within a month Enno had poisoned himself. Jaspers was unable to attend the funeral as a result of his own ill health—an absence that Enno may well have interpreted as a further act of avoidance by his elder brother.

5.3 Difference and Equality

Arendt, born on 14 October 1906 in what is now part of Hanover in Germany, was over twenty-three years younger than Jaspers. In the early to mid-1920s she studied at the universities of Berlin, Marburg and Heidelberg. As recounted in Chap. 1, she embarked—as an eighteen year old undergraduate—on a sexual and deeply emotional affair with Martin Heidegger, a thirty six year old married professor whose work had already received international acclaim. It was in the aftermath of that affair that she completed her doctorate in 1928 under the supervision of Jaspers. By the time of Enno Jaspers' death in 1931, she had moved to Berlin with her first husband, Gunther Stern. There she began work on *Rahel Varnhagen: the Life of a Jewess* (finally published in 1957—see Arendt 1997). By the early 1930s her relationship with Jaspers which had hitherto been highly formal began to shift towards something more akin to friendship.

Paradoxically, one of the main factors influencing this shift was a disagreement between them—or, more specifically, Arendt's honesty in making explicit their difference of viewpoint. On this particular occasion the difference arose as a result of Jaspers having sent Arendt a book he had written on Max Weber and that was published in 1932 with the subtitle 'the German essence in political thought, in scholarship, and in philosophy'. In a letter dated 1 January 1933, Arendt thanked him for the book and then went on to say that although it did not bother her that he had portrayed Weber as 'the great German' it did bother her that he found 'the German essence' in Weber and identified that essence with 'rationality and humanity originating in passion'. She had 'the same difficulty with that as ... with Max Weber's imposing patriotism itself'. As a German Jew she identified primarily with the Jewish people so that any notions of 'the German essence' or of German 'patriotism'

while irrelevant to her personally were in her view politically naïve and intellectually muddled (Kohler and Saner 1992, 16).

Arendt's willingness to speak her mind—together with Jaspers' open and generous response to her doing so—paved the way for what would become a continuing dialogue that enabled them to go on formulating and reformulating their opinions on, among other things, the political fate of Germany, Israel and the USA. Within this dialogue each required and received honesty and respect from the other: in expressing her reservations regarding the book he had sent her, Arendt showed that she could be something other than a former student and junior colleague, while in responding with openness Jaspers showed that he could be something other than a former supervisor and mentor. The common ground of intellectual dissent was where they discovered and developed their lifelong friendship. Theirs was a deeply *pedagogical friendship* in which each learned from—and taught—the other.

Following Jaspers' dismissal in 1937 from his post at the University of Heidelberg, Arendt maintained throughout the war years intermittent contact with him and his wife. Throughout the war years—and, indeed, until his relocation to Basel, Switzerland, in 1948—Jaspers and his wife were in a highly vulnerable position personally while he was also professionally and academically marginalised. During this period Arendt supported them by sending food parcels from the USA. It was partly as a result of these acts of kindness that Gertrud and Arendt also formed an enduring bond of friendship. What united Jaspers and Arendt was their shared experience of the horrors of Nazism, but each of them had different perspectives on that experience. It was those differences of perspective that forged their friendship. They were each in very different places and the differences mattered in terms of how they made sense of what they both saw as the near death experience of civilisation as they knew and valued it.

By the time Arendt and Jaspers were able to resume a regular correspondence—at the end of WWII—she was already adopting a tragic world view: in her working through of the ideas and analyses that informed her 1951 *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she was developing a critique of totalitarianism as a unique and catastrophic intervention in human affairs; her 1958 *The Human Condition* is also tragic in its Aristotelian emphasis on the irreversibility and unpredictability of human action; and, in her 1963 *On Revolution*, she was to judge the French and Russian revolutions as tragic failures that had sought to achieve liberty at the expense of freedom (see Arendt 1973, 1998, 2006a). In what she saw as the inevitable choice between liberty from the sheer necessity imposed by abject poverty and the constitution of a free and vibrant polity, both these iconic revolutions had opted for the former—and in so doing had each led to its own version of 'terror': either, the terrorism of Robespierre or that of Hitler and Stalin. This was, arguably, a bleak and in many ways a conservative view of the world; it was, undoubtedly, a tragic one.

Although seemingly a more conservative character—reserved, formal and cautious—Jaspers was more comedic in outlook. He naturally favoured fortune and providence over fate. Arendt—although more gregarious and risk-taking—was more inclined to scepticism on the big issues that concerned them: the future of Germany, the legitimacy of Israel, and the role of the USA. Her unerring sense of the tragic

looked to him for some modification and shading into hope. His more hopeful outlook was in turn modified and finely shaded by her worldly scepticism. Whereas he was inclined to optimism, she was disposed to caution. As her mentor he had sought to rein in what he saw as her impetuosity.

But it was she who, as their friendship flourished, sought to temper what she took to be his sometimes uncritical enthusiasm. Their friendship was based on a finely tuned complementarity of differing outlooks and dispositions whereby each went on learning from the other—the means by which they communicated not only with one another but about the world they both knew and were seeking to understand.

5.4 Talking About Nationhood

For both Arendt and Jaspers philosophy was inextricably entwined with politics, and politics was, in turn, inextricably entwined in their own life histories. The pressing concerns of their time—the future of Europe and the reconstruction of Germany, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the emergence of the USA as a world power—raised questions which were, for them, not merely of academic interest but of personal significance and public consequence. It was the impact of those questions on their own lives, together with their own insistence on confronting and addressing them, that enabled Arendt and Jaspers to pronounce from their own experience on world events and thereby achieve the authority of public intellectuals.

Each was differently placed in relation to those events: Arendt as a German Jew rendered stateless by the geopolitics of post-WWII Europe and finally gaining US citizenship; Jaspers as a German gentile married to a Jew and finally gaining refuge in Switzerland. Both had their own reasons to have to think through what it meant to be German and Jewish, what Israel signified as both the Jewish homeland and as a new state within the emergent world order, and how the USA should shape its increasingly powerful role in the world. Yet, for both of them that process of thinking through—a process that Arendt characterised as ‘worldliness’ and Jaspers as ‘encompassing’—was a philosophical and political necessity (see Arendt 1978, I, 19–23; Jaspers 1971, 17–29). Their lifelong dialogue was among other things a serious and sustained attempt to address that need by clarifying their own positions and disagreements and sharing their experiences: a sharing that increasingly involved their spouses as their own friendship reached out to their families and their wider circle of friends.

German nationalism was, as already noted, one of their early points of disagreement. At the time of the early exchange regarding Jaspers’ recourse to the notion of ‘the German essence’, Arendt was still a German citizen. Even then, in 1933, she rejected Jaspers’ attempt to counter the growth of fascism through a reconstruction of German ‘patriotism’ based on the idea of a national ‘essence’ or ‘German character’. How as a Jew—albeit still a German Jew—could she possibly make sense of such an argument as a viable strategy for resisting the rise of fascism? As part of that early exchange Arendt pits her own experience against that of her mentor:

I am of course a German in the sense that I wrote of before. But I can't simply add a German historical and political destiny to that ... Germany in its old glory is your past. What my Germany is can hardly be expressed in one phrase, for any oversimplification – whether it be that of the Zionists, the assimilationists, or the anti-Semites – only serves to obscure the true problem of the situation. (Kohler and Saner 1992, 18–19)

After WWII, in a letter written in 1947, Jaspers picks up on the themes of the earlier exchange. Their ongoing dialogue has various strands which they develop across time and sometimes with a considerable span of intervening correspondence on other matters. So, after the catastrophes of WWII which they have experienced in different ways and in different places, Jaspers returns to one of the earlier strands and begins to redevelop it:

I think constantly now, with my heart, about what my being a German means. Until 1933 that was never problematic for me. But now ...: The whole world shrieks at one, so to speak: You are a German. Jaspers then shifts from the question of his own German identity to that of Jewish identity, linking the latter to 'the idea of God': 'What a Jew is seems clearer to me than what a German is. Biblical religion and the idea of God and the idea of the Covenant are crucial to the Jew. (Kohler and Saner 1992, 94)

Responding to this letter—and in the course of many practical details regarding the publication of his lectures, her current writing schedule, and the food parcels which she sent to the Jaspers each month throughout the war years—Arendt pits her own experience as a non-religious Jew against his notion of what it means to be a Jew: 'Historically, you are correct in everything you say. But the fact remains that many Jews such as myself are religiously completely independent of *Judaism* yet are still Jews nonetheless' (Kohler and Saner 1992, 98). In effect she rejects his characterisation of what it means to be a Jew, but she does so without any hint of acrimony. Similarly, he receives her rebuttal without any attempt to defend his position or win the argument. Indeed, they both seem to revel in clarifying rather than resolving their disagreements, since in so doing they are also clarifying their own positions and defining their own identities.

5.5 Talking About 'Jewishness'

Following the end of WWII Jaspers and his wife re-located in 1948 to Basel in Switzerland and Arendt finally, in 1951, gained USA citizenship. In 1952, she asked his advice on a manuscript copy of a biography of Rahel Varnhagen which she had completed ten years earlier. In his response Jaspers acknowledged that 'this book is powerful and significant', but expressed the view that, if Arendt were to publish it, it would be 'at the risk that in the light of the highest standards a shadow will fall on you'. His minor reservations concerned 'an excess of repetition' and 'the lack of a detailed chronological table', but his major reservation concerned Arendt's treatment of Varnhagen as a person. He argued that Arendt had failed to let her subject speak 'from her core' because she had interpreted her entirely through the lens of her 'Jewishness': 'you let this figure speak, but not from her core, that is, not as this

human being herself who is not in her nature a Jew but who passes through this world as a Jew and therefore experiences the most extreme things, things that happen not only to Jews'. Varnhagen, in other words, is 'in her nature' first and foremost 'this human being herself' and only secondarily a Jew (Kohler and Saner 1992, 192–196).

From Jaspers' perspective, Arendt had diminished Varnhagen by collapsing her entire identity into that of 'a Jew'. He recommended, therefore, that she 'reduce Rahel's Jewishness to one element in your presentation and let the greatness of her soul stand in the foreground' (Kohler and Saner 1992, 195). In effect, he was suggesting that Arendt distinguish Rahel's 'Jewishness' from 'the greatness of her soul'—that Arendt assimilate Varnhagen's distinctive 'Jewishness' into her common and undifferentiated humanity. Since for Jaspers, 'the idea of God and the idea of the Covenant are crucial to the Jew' (Kohler and Saner 1992, 94), Varnhagen—for whom neither idea was of central importance—could be interpreted as having dissolved her 'Jewishness' into her generalised humanity. Her 'Jewishness' was an accident of birth—a contingency—that could and should be 'naturalised', just as the Jewish diaspora could be assimilated into the 'natural' world order. From this deeply assimilationist perspective, the emergence of an independent politicised Jewish state posed a severe threat.

Responding, Arendt began with her thanks for his 'good, long letter' and her tribute to 'your wonderful thoroughness, your illuminating patience, your listening and responding at the same time and both at once'. She conceded his points regarding the technical and stylistic shortcomings of the work and emphasised that it had been written some time ago prior to her more recent work. Having reflected upon his comments, she had—she declared—made a decision: 'I won't publish the book'. (A re-worked version was published in 1957) She then proceeded to set out at some length her views on Zionism and Jewish assimilation. The book had been written, she wrote, 'from the perspective of a Zionist critique of assimilation, which I had adopted as my own and which I still consider basically justified today'. She then goes on to argue that the picture of Varnhagen put forward by Jaspers is 'in all its essential features' the one drawn by Varnhagen's husband who had been so assiduous in his attempts to erase her Jewish identity and legacy (Kohler and Saner 1992, 196–201).

'Judaism', as she pointed out, 'doesn't exist outside orthodoxy on the one hand or the Yiddish-speaking, folklore-producing Jewish people on the other' (Kohler and Saner 1992, 199). The simple fact of being Jewish does, however, affect one's existence regardless of orthodoxy or folklore. As she did not make explicit but was implicit in her comments, the simple fact of being designated Jewish was a matter of life and death for those living under Nazi occupation, a fact of which Jaspers was himself well aware given the fact that his own wife was a Jew. For the Jew, Arendt implied, 'Jewishness' is not a contingent factor that one might place at a safe distance from one's humanity. On the contrary, it is how one's humanity is perceived and therefore intrinsic to one's being in the world. One may choose one's religious affiliations and commitments, but one cannot choose whether or not to be a Jew. So, for Arendt, assimilation of the Jewish diaspora was not an option and the establishment of an independent politicised Jewish state provided at least the possibility of hope.

In spite of the sensitivity of the issues addressed and the candid exchange of viewpoints, the tone remains one of deep mutual respect as Arendt signs off this round of their correspondence 'with warmest and fondest greetings'. Ironically, given their differing views on assimilation, it is Arendt who goes on to adopt a more critical stance towards Israel. Writing to Arendt in 1956, Jaspers states that '[w]e would seem to be of one mind' in acknowledging that '[t]he "greatness" of Israel's accomplishment is the uniting of moderation and intelligence with boldness, self-sacrifice, and the capability to match words with deeds' (Kohler and Saner 1992, 310–311).

Again, Arendt tactfully points out that they are not 'of one mind' on this issue. She goes on to state that in her opinion the survival of the Jews did not depend upon the existence of the state of Israel and that the Jewish diaspora no longer constituted a significant political presence within Europe (Kohler and Saner 1992, 313). She might have added that, insofar as the Jewish diaspora had a geopolitical epicentre, then this was more likely to be the USA—of which she was now a citizen—than Germany which had rendered her stateless.

5.6 Mutual Flourishing

In spite of their differences—or perhaps because of them—there was an intuitive understanding between Arendt and Jaspers. Each of them possessed—in different ways and differing proportions—their own complex mix of realism and naivety, which made for a certain complementarity in their relationship. That complementarity enabled Jaspers to provide Arendt with the support she desperately needed in the period following the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963 (see Arendt 2006b). He understood that the purpose of her reportage had been to tell the truth rather than to court publicity, but he also understood that she had been naïve not to realise that her truth-telling would be viewed as an act of aggression by those adversely affected by the truths she chose to tell—and that she would, therefore, inevitably face the full blaze of hostile publicity.

He understood, also, how Arendt's particular blend of hard-headed realism and naivety—so different yet not entirely dissimilar to his own—had on this occasion rendered her highly vulnerable: 'You can't tolerate human baseness,' he wrote in 1963, 'and you prefer personally to avoid the public eye. Now you are experiencing both at once.' He continued, in a superbly sympathetic yet critical reading of her report of the Eichmann trial:

I have read your book now from the first to the last line. I consider it marvellous in its subject matter. It bears witness, in its intent, to your uncompromising desire for truth. In its mind-set, I find it profound and full of despair ... And then I think ...: how infinitely naïve not to notice that the act of putting a book into the world is an act of aggression against 'life-sustaining lies.' (Kohler and Saner 1992, 531)

Six years later on 26 February 1969 Arendt received a telegram from Gertrud Jaspers: 'Karl died 1:43 PM. Central European Time'.

He had died—at the age of eighty-six—on Gertrud's ninetieth birthday. Arendt took a flight to Basel to be present at the private funeral. She also took part in the official memorial service at the University of Basel. In her brief speech she tried to define what she had found distinctive and exemplary in Jaspers as a human presence. She said it was the man and not his books that was the true exemplar—because, as she put it, 'Jaspers exemplified in himself, as it were, a fusion of freedom, reason, and communication'. Moreover, he did so in such a way that 'we from henceforth cannot think of these three things—reason, freedom, and communication—as separate but have to think of them as a trinity' (Kohler and Saner 1992, 685).

Their friendship had developed from a highly formal teaching relationship, through a mentoring relationship during which each became mentor to the other, into a friendship based on mutual care and boundless communication involving not only themselves but also their spouses. Their friendship was a complex layering of learning together, sustaining and supporting one another personally and professionally, and talking with one another primarily through their extensive correspondence but also face-to-face on those few occasions that Arendt was able to visit him and his wife. Their friendship was not just another layer of their lives. It was a root system that ran all the way down and all the way across the layers and allowed each of them to flourish.

What was happening within the world—as it affected both themselves and others—was of supreme importance to them both. They brought the world into their friendship while at the same time using their friendship as a means whereby each of them clarified her or his relation to the world. They were worldly in different ways. Both had thought deeply about the world. But she had travelled and experienced it more widely than he—although, as she might well have been the first to point out, not necessarily more deeply. He contributed to their relationship—over and over again—a kind of wisdom. Arendt needed that wisdom just as he needed—from his more sedentary position in Basel—her spontaneity of response. They were both—in their different ways—spectator and participant in the history of their time.

The idea of intellectual friendship is not a solution to the relational dysfunctionality of the academic workplace, but it does provide a lens through which to focus on alternative ways of working together, being together and thinking together. Viewed through that lens, the importance of continuity becomes immediately apparent—not continuity at any cost but continuity that recognises differences of background and disposition, differences of viewpoint and opinion, differences of individual trajectory and expectation. The continuity that characterised Arendt's and Jaspers' friendship was grounded in a kind of amicable *dissensus*. Indeed, their friendship was an ongoing process of agreeing to disagree and discovering the boundaries between agreement

and disagreement. But—and it is a big ‘but’—always in the spirit and practice of mutual trust.

The continuity of their relationship gave to each of their lives a sense of narrative unity; not a fixed and predetermined unity, but a unity-in-the-making: what Alasdair MacIntyre (1985, 204–225) terms ‘the unity of a human life’. It was a unity constantly being constructed and reconstructed through their ongoing dialogue about ideas and events and continually reinforced by the routines and activities of friendship. Towards the end of the first volume of her last unfinished work—*The Life of the Mind*—Arendt wrote: ‘That we can shape the everlasting stream of sheer change into a time continuum we owe not to time itself but to the continuity of our business and our activities in the world, in which *we continue* what we started yesterday and hope to finish tomorrow’ (original emphasis, Arendt 1978, I, 205). Their relationship was one of those ‘activities in the world’ by which they shaped ‘a time continuum’, and in so doing experienced time, not as an ‘everlasting stream of sheer change’ that swept them along and against which they had no resistance, but as a narrative that allowed the past to be gathered and re-gathered and the future to be imagined and re-imagined.

5.7 Coda: What We Owe One Another

The case documented in this chapter highlights the *educational* potential of friendship and the qualities we associate with friendship: mutuality, reciprocity, trustworthiness and continuity. In doing so, it raises some important questions: Do we, as educators and citizens, take seriously the quality of the relationships within our designated institutions of education? And, outside such institutions, do we as citizens, see relationships as a continuing source of lifelong learning—a way of flourishing together in a range of associative contexts and situations?

Arendt did not address these questions directly, but they are within the parameters of the concerns embraced by her notion of promise. She understood that education is a binding agreement which each generation should honour and preserve. For Arendt, the promise of education was:

- *The promise of natality: the possibility of new beginnings*: Birth, for Arendt, was the originating metaphor—the entirely unique being entering the world. But throughout her work she makes clear that each of us is constantly making and remaking our way through a complex and unpredictable world—and that education is central to that task. One implication of this premise is that sometimes the young, the uninitiated and the naïve may be the teachers of the older, initiated and supposedly sophisticated bearers of tradition.
- *The promise of a common world: the possibility of shared meanings*: The idea of the communal table around which we sit, eat and converse, was the central metaphor in Arendt’s thinking about commonality. We sit together in *difference*, but we sit *together*. And the task is to acknowledge and respect the differences and

to deliberate on the basis of that acknowledgement and that mutual respect. It is on the basis of that talking and thinking together in recognition of one another's differences that we begin to understand one another.

- *The promise of mutual flourishing: the possibility of becoming ourselves*: Education is centrally concerned with how I gain a sense of my own purposefulness. It is ethically driven, in respect of how I begin to define my own ends and purposes, and morally driven in respect of how I relate those ends and purposes to my treatment of others. Education is grounded in both the moral precepts of mutual recognition and the ethical precepts of human fulfilment.
- *The promise of futurity: the possibility of sustainability*: How individually and collectively we move through into the future is central to the educational project. It is the *promise* of education—the solemn if unstated promise of one generation to the next—to help build a world that is sustainable. Each generation renews that promise, which notwithstanding its solemnity, is always fragile.

Between promise and fulfilment lies the inevitable uncertainty and unpredictability of human affairs: the complexity of differing and often conflicting societal norms, individual and group interests, and political ideologies. What education might mean—and how it might be organised—in the last three quarters of the 21st Century is open to question. If we follow the occasional markers set down by Arendt we will need to find an alternative language for talking about the ends, purposes and processes of education: not a language of prespecified goals and targets, of pre-defined skills and competencies, but a language that captures the necessary unpredictability and wonder of learning. Arendt was clear that the responsibility of one generation to the next in helping to find a route through that unpredictability and in conveying a sense of the unlimited wonder of the world is—and will remain—of paramount importance in any democratic society.

It is what we owe one another.

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Appendix A

Chronology of Arendt's Life and Works

- 1906 Born 14 October in Linden, Germany (now part of Hanover).
- 1909 Moves to Königsberg with her parents.
- 1913 Father dies.
- 1920 Mother remarries.
- 1922–23 Studies at the University of Berlin in preparation for the university entrance examination (the *Abitur*).
- 1924 Enters Marburg University where she studies under Martin Heidegger.
- 1925 Embarks on a clandestine relationship with Heidegger.
- 1926 Breaks relationship with Heidegger, but continues intermittent correspondence until 1933. Summer semester: moves to the University of Heidelberg to study under Karl Jaspers. Winter semester: studies with Edmund Husserl at the University of Freiberg.
- 1927–28 Studies at the University of Heidelberg. Autumn: receives doctorate (under the direction of Jaspers).
- 1929 Meets Günther Stern whom she marries later that year.
- 1930 Moves with Stern to Berlin. Receives grant from the Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft for her project 'the problem of German-Jewish assimilation, as seen through the example of the life of Rahel Varnhagen'.
- 1930–33 Publishes essays in magazines and newspapers.
- 1933 The Reichstag fire in Berlin. Stern flees to Paris. Arendt and her mother arrested and questioned for over a week. Flees to Paris via Prague and Geneva and begins eighteen years as a 'stateless person'.
- 1933–42 Member of the World Zionist Organization.
- 1934 Becomes friends with Walter Benjamin and Raymond Aron in Paris.
- 1935–38 General Secretary of Youth Aliyah in Paris.
- 1935 Undertakes three-month trip to Palestine in connection with work for Youth Aliyah.
- 1936 Meets Heinrich Blücher.
- 1936–39 Makes yearly trips to Geneva.
- 1937 Divorces Günther Stern, 26 August.
- 1937–38 Completes Rahel Varnhagen project.

- 1938 Mother flees Königsberg and moves in with Arendt and Blücher in Paris.
- 1938–39 Works for the Jewish Agency in Paris.
- 1940 War declared between France and Germany. Marries Heinrich Blücher, 16 January. Blücher detained in internment camp in Villernard and released after two months. Arendt detained with her mother (Marta Arendt) in Gurs internment camp for women in the south of France. France defeated. Escapes with Marta to Montauban, France.
- 1941 Escapes Vichy France with Blücher via Spain to Lisbon. May: arrives in the US. After an initial stay in Massachusetts moves with Blücher into furnished rooms at 315 West 95th Street, New York. 26 June: Marta Arendt, arrives in New York.
- 1941–45 Staff writer for the New York weekly *Aufbau*.
- 1942 News of the German concentration and extermination camps for Jews begins to filter out.
- 1944 Begins work on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.
- 1945–46 Research Director for the commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction.
- 1945–47 Lecturer in European history at Brooklyn College.
- 1946–48 Editor at Schocken Books in New York.
- 1948 Marta Arendt dies.
- 1949–52 Director of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction.
- 1949 Moves with Blücher into apartment at 130 Morningside Drive in New York.
- 1949–50 Makes first post-WWII trip to Europe. Reunited with Jaspers and his wife Gertrud.
- 1950 Becomes senior editor at Schocken Books in New York.
- 1951 *The Origins of Totalitarianism* published. Becomes US citizen, 11 December.
- 1955 Visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley.
- 1958 *The Human Condition* published. *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* finally published.
- 1959 Awarded the Lessing Prize of the City of Hamburg. Moves with Blücher to an apartment at 370 Riverside Drive in New York.
- 1961 Covers the trial of Adolph Eichmann in Jerusalem for *The New Yorker*. *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* published.
- 1963 Publishes a five-part article in *The New Yorker* on the Eichmann trial. A revised version is published in book form as *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. *On Revolution* published.
- 1963–67 Professor at the University of Chicago.
- 1967 Awarded the Sigmund Freud Prize of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung in Darmstadt.
- 1967–75 Professor at the New School for Social Research in New York.
- 1968 *Men in Dark Times* published. Second edition of *Between Past and Future* published with additional material.
- 1969 Jaspers dies 26 February (aged 86) *On Violence* published.

- 1970 Blücher dies (aged 71).
- 1973 Gives the first series of Gifford Lectures on thinking at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. New edition (with added prefaces) of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* published.
- 1974 May: suffers heart attack while giving the first lecture in the second series of Gifford Lectures on willing.
- 1975 Awarded Sonning Prize of the University of Copenhagen. Goes to Germany to put Jasper's papers in order. Dies of a second heart attack on 4 December (aged 69).
- 1978 *The Life of the Mind* (two volumes) based on the Gifford Lectures of 1973–1974 and edited by McCarthy published posthumously.

Appendix B

Select Bibliography

For those unfamiliar with Arendt's work, Peter Baehr's 2003 comprehensive and judicious selection is a good starting point. The letters—particularly Lotte Kohler's (1996) edition of Arendt's correspondence with Heinrich Blücher—highlight Arendt's deep commitment to particular individuals and the importance of her lifelong friendships. Richard J. Bernstein's 2018 study provides a succinct and highly readable argument for the continuing relevance of Arendt's political thought, while Helen Gunter's and Wayne Veck's 2019 edited volume offers a range of perspectives on the significance of her thinking for education. The most authoritative and detailed account of her life remains Elizabeth Young-Bruehl's 1982 biography.

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